

THE THEATRE

BY

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EDITOR OF "GREAT MODERN BRITISH PLAYS"
"ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY" ETC.

NEW EDITION REVISED



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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

BOOKS which deal, wholly or in part, with the contemporary theatre are constantly getting out of date. Old playwrights disappear; new playwrights arrive; and while some who seemed to be promising at first failed to justify one's hopes, there were others who made unexpectedly good with increasing practice and experience.

This little book on the theatre was written a dozen years ago, and in the interval we have lost men like Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and Sir James Barrie. On the other hand, we have new arrivals in J. B. Priestley and James Bridie, while other playwrights like Noel Coward have written new plays of outstanding importance.

The earlier, historical part of the book has been left very much as it was, but the chapters dealing with recent years have been considerably modified. No doubt there are omissions in this revised book, but even if there were none at the moment of writing there would be others appearing during the next few years. After all, this is as it should be: the theatre, which reflects the age through which it is passing, must change or perish. It prefers to change.

J. W. M.

FOREWORD

I SHOULD like to explain at the outset that this little book about drama is intended not for the seasoned playgoer but for the young man or woman who enjoys the theatre and would rather like a few hints about drama and theatregoing. There is nothing in it which the expert does not already know. People who want to study the finer points of dramatic criticism can read newspaper articles by the professional critics and many books on the subject by men like C. E. Montague, Allardyce Nicoll, Ashley Dukes, Frank Vernon, and James Agate.

Most of us experience a thrill on going to a theatre, and for those who cannot go very often there is always the possibility of enjoyment to be derived from the reading of a good play either when alone or in a play-reading circle. But I know that when one has no guidance there is the danger of wasting an evening by choosing the 'second-rate or third-rate and missing the best. It is useless to follow the crowd in this matter : the crowd may lead you to a fine play, but it is more than likely that you will be carried along to see a popular 'star' performing in some fatuous play, the futility of which has been camouflaged by catchy music, pretty frocks, and glamorous stage effects.

It is unfortunate when you waste time and money on a 'shoddy' play, but the mischief goes deeper than the loss of three hours and a few shillings. It may spoil your taste and warp your judgment, until the time comes when you actually prefer the inferior play—which means that your intelligence has been 'doped' pretty effectively. An even worse result is that real masterpieces fail to win the success they deserve and threaten to disappear from the stage altogether, so that the good dramatist goes on working in comparative obscurity, while the applause and glory are given to some clever fellow who tickles the popular fancy for a season and then retires to live affluently ever after.

Recent theatrical history is full of these anomalies, and to anyone who has a genuine admiration for drama, or even a primitive instinct for justice, they are not in the least amusing.

Nevertheless, if I recommend you to see the best plays—those which John Drinkwater called “imaginative drama,” in contrast to artificial or mechanically manufactured plays—the question of justice to playwrights is relegated to the background. I am not even thinking of one’s duty to support good art: I am thinking primarily of your own enjoyment.

Perhaps, since this is a personal explanation of my feelings in approaching the subject of playgoing, I may be allowed to gossip a little about early experiences.

You probably went to the theatre when you were very young and saw a Christmas pantomime or two, a children’s play, like *Peter Pan* or *Where the Rainbow Ends*, and possibly a few performances by the dramatic society in your school at the end of the term. If so, you were lucky to have discovered the pleasure of playgoing in your extreme youth. I was less fortunate: I lived in a village where there were no theatricals beyond a nigger concert, and we had no chance of seeing plays in school.

In addition to the disadvantage of living twenty miles from a town, there was always the feeling that playgoing was dangerous and even sinful! I remember vividly how my father once risked it and went to see *The Little Minister*, because, he felt, it was about a subject which could not possibly be abnormally wicked. He enjoyed the play enormously, being reassured by the presence of several clergymen in the audience, and talked about his experience for weeks after. But an uncle of ours who visited the theatre a few nights later returned in a state of indignation. The *Little Minister* himself may have been a holy man, but Babbie was a worldly minded young minx, and her beauty was one of the snares of the devil to ruin the career of an earnest-minded man, whose thoughts should have been set on higher things. It was a very dangerous play—especially for the young. “This way to the Pit” had a sinister meaning in those days.

Of course, I had made the acquaintance of Shakespeare in school, where we had a different play every term. The form master, who specialized in mathematics and chemistry, had the task of expounding *The Merchant of Venice* to Form III. I cannot say whether he appreciated the play or not, but if he did he disguised his enthusiasm with a display of neutrality that would have done credit to a judge or a philosopher. He compelled us to memorize twenty-five lines a week, dictated copious notes on sources of the plot, internal and external evidences of the date, obsolete words, obscure allusions, disputed passages, and a catalogue of the virtues and vices possessed by the principal characters. He treated the poetry as so much raw material for lessons on grammar. He discoursed on derivations of words and changes of meaning; and once, I remember, when I asked him whether the quality of mercy was 'strained' like coffee, or 'strained' like a tight-rope, he replied that it was not strained at all, so why worry?

The boys in our school were not fanatically interested in Shakespeare, and I don't think we ever visualized the plays as dramas produced upon an Elizabethan stage. Shakespeare meant little more than a subject for examination—one of the dozen obstacles between the student and a 'pass.' It would be difficult to invent a more effective method of destroying any innate appreciation for poetry or drama than this treatment of Shakespeare in schools.

Things are much better to-day. The teacher of literature is generally an enthusiast, and whenever a chance occurs he accompanies the pupils to a *matinée* to see the play performed by competent actors.

When I was sixteen years of age I was presented with a ticket for a performance of *Twelfth Night* by Ben Greet's company, but I must confess that I was not at all elated. I had never 'done' *Twelfth Night* at school, and knew nothing about it, and I fancy I was rather annoyed about missing a half-day's cricket (or perhaps it was 'swot'—the Matriculation was looming near), so

I went somewhat reluctantly, little dreaming what was to befall.

The 'theatre' was a natural clearing in a Kentish wood: there was no stage, no curtains, and no scenery but a tree-stump. The month was May, and the blue skies shone through the tops of the oaks and birches, which were vividly green. Thrushes and blackbirds were singing rapturously, and at intervals a cuckoo called.

Then I became aware of another voice—a man's clear tenor that rose and fell, grew louder and fainter, evoking a mood of sentiment such as one associates with *O Sole Mio* sung by Caruso. While the song was proceeding the Duke strolled into the open space, and the play began:

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a dying fall:
O! it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour!

That was sheer magic! A few lines of lyrical beauty, and I was transported into a world of enchantment where participles and subordinate clauses were unknown. I don't remember anything about the audience—I saw nothing of them. I had discovered a new joy that was intoxicating, and the whole of life seemed miraculously different. The things that hitherto mattered so inordinately—the Matriculation syllabus, for example—became meaningless. All the school subjects were dull, stupid, deadening.

Viola appeared, and she was adorable. I lay awake the greater part of the night recalling her looks, her gestures, her lovely words; and when I slept I dreamed of Viola. There never was such a heroine—so charmingly saucy, so wistfully sad, so capable of weaving a romantic spell. How wonderfully she loved the Duke! Yet by reason of her boy's disguise he

could not realize it. And how movingly she confessed her love!

A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

There were the comic scenes too. Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, with their Rabelaisian mirth, their songs at midnight, their great joke against the steward, Malvolio's discovery of the letter, and his subsequent appearance with his yellow stockings and his cross-garters.

Then there was the sense of everything going wrong, a tangle growing more and more complicated; the arrival of Sebastian, and the feeling that everything would come right; the gloriously happy ending!

And that was Shakespeare! That was playgoing! It was a tremendous and exhilarating discovery.

I have seen *Twelfth Night* a dozen times since then, generally in theatres with elaborate scenery and 'star' performers; but it has never been quite so good as that first time in the open air.

The second play I saw was *The Tempest* at His Majesty's. I was in the gallery, and although I had missed a meal to get there the curtain was going up as I took my seat. I shall never forget that magnificent scene. From my perch at the back of the theatre I found myself gazing at a sea with rolling billows that came crashing on the foreshore, a black sky that was rent with lightnings, a vivid glimpse of a ship in distress, cries of the mariners, roars of thunder . . . and when the curtain fell it was a distinct shock to find myself in a theatre. But I had not heard a word, only shoutings that were drowned in the wind, the noise of waves, the thunderstorm.

There followed a scene on the shore; Prospero in a gorgeous robe was talking to young Miranda. The setting was beautiful, but I remember nothing that was said. Miss Viola Tree was

Ariel, and the scene in which she sang her famous "Where the bee sucks" was ravishingly beautiful. She was hidden in a tree among the blossom, and when at last the branches parted and her face appeared the audience burst into applause so loud and prolonged that it seemed like frenzy.

In thinking about *The Tempest* as I saw it nearly forty years ago I remember the Caliban of Sir Herbert Tree, I remember Ariel's happy singing, I recall picture after picture—golden sands, magic caves, mermaids, fairies—but for the life of me I cannot remember the story. I am left wondering whether a lavish production may not defeat its own purpose and eclipse the play of which it was the setting.

Still, it was Shakespeare, and the atmosphere was that of romance—utterly remote from the commonplace world in which we live. The theatre was an escape from reality into beautiful illusion. It never occurred to me that it was unnatural for people to talk together in exquisite poetry. When one reflects upon it it is not unnatural: it is supernatural.

The third play I saw, *A Message from Mars*, was performed in a village hall. It was interesting and at times rather moving. The idea was fantastic, but it was a great sermon against selfishness, vaguely reminiscent of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. The characters were more or less real people, and talked the language of everyday life. They behaved, for the most part, as people would probably have behaved in those conditions.

After this I saw a succession of melodramas. The 'characters' talked prose, but it was not the language of daily life at all. It was bombastic, rhetorical, and it was all violently overdone. The humour was too heavy and obvious; the pathos was too harrowing and maudlin; the excitement was artificially created, and seemed as false as the dialogue. Some of them were moving, to a novice, but they would not stand thinking about afterwards. One could not forget that it was all acting: it did not seem real. A man with a sense of humour could not have delivered those 'eloquent' speeches without wanting to laugh. It was

impossible to listen to them without being moved to mirth at the wrong moment.

Then I think of the good modern play of the type of *Strife*, *Hobson's Choice*, or *The Tragedy of Nan*. Here, as in the great poetic play of Shakespeare, one forgets the theatre altogether and comes to grips with real life, real people, real dialogue. The characters seem as much alive as our own uncles and aunts—and vastly more interesting. They are portrayed by artists who have studied humanity and have the skill to create men and women so convincingly that the audience can share their emotions and identify themselves with the characters.

These plays compel one to think by stirring the emotion and striking the imagination. They may cause us to scrap some of our ready-made theories and conventional notions, and they often make us feel that ordinary life is futile and 'little.' The great dramatist stimulates the mind to move in bigger arcs, and the exultation that comes from this ampler liberty is a positive and passionate pleasure.

It is difficult to explain this sense of emancipation which belongs to drama. If I am tired or bored at the end of a long day I can go to see *Charley's Aunt* or *Tons of Money*, and the farces will give me a hearty laugh—provided that I am not too critical—and I have a feeling of temporary relief for which I am duly grateful.

But when I went to see Ibsen's great tragedy *Hedda Gabler*, with Mrs Patrick Campbell playing the part of Hedda, there was no sense of diversion or amusement. It seemed rather as if I were lifted up by some mighty wave of emotion and transported bodily into a world of elemental things. There was an escape from a paltry existence into life itself: one looked on the face of life and felt humbled, as if it were the face of God; one stood in the presence of death and was filled with unconquerable courage.

The exultation which comes from a tempest, or a mountain summit, or a Beethoven symphony, or an epic poem belongs

also to great drama; and it makes all the ingenious farces, artificial melodramas, and 'crook' plays seem like banjos after a cathedral organ.

I have seen a large number of plays since I went to that open-air performance of *Twelfth Night*, but I have not been so often that I can enter a theatre without a feeling of excitement and anticipation. I still feel a thrill when the curtain rises for the first act. I rarely go to a theatre merely to kill time, to see a particular actor or actress, or because everybody else is going. I want to see a play as I want to read a poem or a novel—because I hope it will be worth it.

There is pleasure too in thinking about a play afterwards. Was the main theme sound? Was it based upon a firm psychological foundation and a profound insight into human nature? Were the characters real, or were they stage 'sticks'? Does one feel that they live off the stage as well as on it? Does Edgar Wallace create figures to carry out his ingenious plot, and can we imagine them as existing outside it? In what way are the characters in *The Ringer* essentially different from those in *The First Mrs Fraser*?

What do the critics mean when they assert that Galsworthy has been influenced by the French and the Russians? What is the theory of 'the fourth wall'? In what ways is a Galsworthy play different from a Shaw play? What does Mr Rubinstein mean when he says that to Clifford Bax and Ashley Dukes Shaw's plays are anathema?

Why is *The School for Scandal* considered a greater play than *The Rivals*? What great things did Sheridan and Goldsmith do for English drama in the eighteenth century? How did Ibsen react upon English drama in the nineteenth century? Why is Tom Robertson's name honoured by dramatists to-day? In what ways did H. A. Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero help to set the theatre free? What is the significance of the new schools of expressionism, naturalism, symbolism, and the like? Is a new movement something unheard of, or is it a revival of an old-

fashioned type of drama? These are a few of the questions that occur to the thoughtful playgoer.

We can only judge by comparisons, and in order to understand modern poetry or drama it is necessary to see it against an historical background. One can only judge modern poetry or fiction by measuring it against the masterpieces of other days. To estimate the work of Einstein one needs to know the work of Newton and Laplace.

The story of the gradual evolution of drama from its simple beginnings is a fascinating one, and before I venture to write about the condition of the theatre of to-day I shall give an account of its origin and its many ups and downs—the alterations imposed by religion or by law, the influences of the buildings and of the audiences, the effects of foreign drama upon our native playwrights.

But I shall omit anything and everything which is dull unless it happens to have had important effects upon the theatre of our own times.

J. W. M.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DRAMA IN REAL LIFE	19
II. THE EARLIEST DRAMA	24
III. THE BEGINNINGS OF DRAMA IN ENGLAND	30
IV. THE NEXT PHASE	40
V. THE RENAISSANCE	45
VI. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	53
VII. SHAKESPEARE AND HIS FRIENDS	61
VIII. PURITANS : ANCIENT AND MODERN	70
IX. RESTORATION DRAMA	75
X. THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	81
XI. THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	88
XII. THE INFLUENCE OF IBSEN	97
XIII. DRAMATISTS OF OUR OWN TIME—I	102
XIV. DRAMATISTS OF OUR OWN TIME—II	119
XV. THE REPERTORY MOVEMENT	135
XVI. SALVATION BY AMATEURS	150
XVII. A LIST OF PLAYS	161
XVIII. PLAYS AND PLAYWRITING	166
XIX. <u>THE THEATRE</u>	180
XX. <u>THE MAKING OF A PLAY</u>	193
APPENDIX	204
INDEX	219

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
THE AUDIENCE AT SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THEATRE OF DIONYSOS, ATHENS	24
TWO STATUETTES OF GREEK ACTORS	25
CHRIST HARROWING HELL	32
MEDIEVAL PAGEANTS	33
KEAN AS BARABAS IN "THE JEW OF MALTA"	48
KEAN AS OTHELLO	49
A COMPANY OF STROLLING PLAYERS	64
PART OF AN OLD MAP OF LONDON, SHOWING FOUR THEATRES ON THE BANKSIDE, SOUTHWARK	65
SCENE FROM "THE PLAIN DEALER," BY WYCHERLEY	80
SCENE FROM "THE WAY OF THE WORLD," BY CONGREVE	81
PLAYBILL OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL," BY SHERIDAN	84
THE SCREEN SCENE FROM "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL"	85
SCENE FROM "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA," EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	92
SCENE FROM "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA," TWENTIETH CENTURY	93
"HAMLET" IN MODERN DRESS, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	96
"HAMLET" IN MODERN DRESS, TWENTIETH CENTURY	97
SCENE FROM "OURS," BY ROBERTSON	112
SCENE FROM GILBERT AND SULLIVAN'S OPERA "THE GONDOLIERS"	113
SCENE FROM "STRIFE," BY GALSWORTHY	128
SCENE FROM "THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON," BY BARRIE	129
SCENE FROM "SAINT JOAN," BY SHAW	144
SCENE FROM "HIS HOUSE IN ORDER," BY PINERO	145
THE SWAN THEATRE	160
THE STAGE ABOUT 1670	161

ILLUSTRATIONS

17

	PAGE
DRURY LANE THEATRE IN 1776	176
INTERIOR OF DRURY LANE THEATRE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	177
THE DUG-OUT SET USED FOR "JOURNEY'S END"	192
SCENE FROM "ABRAHAM LINCOLN," BY DRINKWATER	193
THE GHOST SCENE FROM "MACBETH"	208
SCENE FROM "ARMS AND THE MAN," BY SHAW, IN THE OPEN AIR	209

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CHAPTER I

DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

I SUPPOSE everybody has discovered how extremely difficult it is to describe a thing exactly as it happened. There is always a strong temptation to improve an incident in the telling—to make it appear more humorous, more pathetic, or more thrilling than it actually was. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all apt to ‘sharpen the focus,’ to intensify the colours, to add finishing touches; and in some cases we may alter the sequence of events, or deliberately invent new details in order to make the story more effective. This retouching of a narrative is often regarded as a species of lying, but it would be more correct to describe it as treating the subject with imagination.

When a man says that he never goes to a theatre because real life is full of drama he is talking nonsense. The events of real life may be dramatic, but they lack that sense of form which is necessary for our artistic satisfaction. It is thrilling to see an acrobat walking a tight-rope, a fireman rescuing a child from the top of a burning building, or the Flying Squad chasing the jewel-thieves who have made off in a stolen car. The newspapers supply us with “Dramatic Discoveries” almost daily, and, in war-time especially, the B.B.C. gives us vivid eyewitness accounts of deeds of superlative heroism. But none of these sensational real-life stories satisfies us in the same way that a good novel or a good play does. They have no unity or continuity; they are unfinished, and have too many loose ends; they have no climax, or if there is a climax there is nothing else. G. K. Chesterton once said that life was like a dozen detective stories mixed up with a spoon.

Fiction is naturally dramatic. One recalls how John Halifax faced the angry mobs and deliberately shut the door behind him, cutting off all chance of retreat; how Sydney Carton took his

friend's place in the prison and went to the guillotine; how Gerard, trapped by the robbers in the windmill, escaped by leaping into space and catching hold of the revolving sail; how Alan Breck and David Balfour fought a desperate battle against the entire crew.

These incidents are more satisfying to our dramatic sense than most of the happenings of real life, but even in the historical examples it is almost certain that popular imagination has re-touched or remoulded them. Thus fiction bears the same relation to reality that a piece of porcelain bears to the primitive clay. The drama of real life exists only in fragments or lumps, but the genius with creative imagination uses these fragments or lumps as his raw material.

There are a dozen explanations given by people when they are asked why they go to the theatre. Many men and women go because they want an evening's amusement—a dinner in a good restaurant, followed by a 'show.' It is a perfectly legitimate desire, and even the 'highbrow' must admit that the theatre which caters for amusement is often extremely competent. One sometimes has to choose between an efficient 'show' which makes no appeal to the mind and an excellent play which is indifferently produced.

Some want to see a favourite actor or actress, and care little whether the play is good or bad. The pity is that so many of our actors who have done splendid work as amateurs, or as members of Repertory companies, are bribed by huge salaries to go to the West End and waste their talents on plays which are barely second-rate. Sir Henry Irving could always attract the crowds by the sheer magnetism of his art, but he often produced plays which were poor in quality. It was rather like employing a great artist to paint armorial bearings on a motor-car. As long as the public will flock to see a particular 'star' instead of a company acting as a team the high-salaried 'star' will continue to do harm to the cause of drama. Others want to gaze at the beauty chorus, to see pretty frocks, to watch the dancing. Others, again, want

to be moved to laughter, to tears, or to cold shudders—to give their emotions free play after the monotony of an unexciting daily round. And there are yet others who want to see a play which will stimulate the intellect, or give them a thesis for argument.

None of these answers is satisfactory, however. That great Irish playwright, J. M. Synge, put it in this way:

The drama is made serious . . . by the degree in which it gives the nourishment on which our imaginations live. We should not go to the theatre as we go to a chemist's, or a dram-shop, but as we go to a dinner where the food we need is taken with pleasure and excitement.

A poor play or a cheap musical comedy may be compared to drugs or cocktails: it produces an artificial excitement for a short time, and helps one to forget. Good drama helps one to remember and understand: it saves the soul alive.

It occasionally happens that a simple-minded person in the audience is so carried away by the acting that he shouts to the players. "Look out, you fool!" exclaimed a sailor in the gallery when he saw the villain steal up behind the hero with a knife in his hand. The rest of the audience laughed, of course, for they knew that the hero was fully aware of what was happening behind him. The company on the stage must play the children's game of "Let's pretend." The look of surprise is simulated; the outburst of anger is make-believe; the tears are as unreal as the laughter; and the trees forming the background are no trees at all. For three hours, at any rate, the actors have to abandon their own private personalities and pretend to be other people.

The members of the audience join in the same conspiracy, for otherwise the play would not affect them at all. They laugh at the panic-stricken sailor, it is true, but they are doing the same kind of thing less completely. They treat the play as if it were real while it lasts. They know in their hearts that the man who is acting Macbeth has not really killed the King. They will see Duncan come before the curtain at the end, and they quite

understand that his golden crown is made of cardboard. But we can enjoy a play only by forgetting that we are in a theatre, that the 'room' is no room, that the 'wall' is no wall. In a sense, the audience have to 'pretend' as sincerely as the actors who give the performance. Drama belongs to the world of make-believe, but we like to pretend that we have not stepped over the boundary of the real world.

The difficult thing to explain is that the characters in drama are more real to us than the thousands of flesh-and-blood people we meet in the streets, and the life portrayed in drama is more true than our daily existence. When adults go to a fancy-dress ball they unconsciously reveal their unconfessed longings to be somebody else. The ordinary dress of every day is a kind of disguise made compulsory by fashion, but when we are acting we often betray our real selves. Paradoxical as it may sound, we are sometimes acting less when we are acting than when we are not. Hence acting is healthy fun to old and young alike.

There are a dozen reasons why people act, and only one reason why they do not, namely, that they are self-conscious and afraid of giving themselves away.

In the same way there are many explanations of the motive which a dramatist has for writing plays. He may do so to make money or to win fame; he may be a reformer and write a play to expound his ideas and arouse public indignation; he may even be driven to this occupation because he wants to kill time. None of these reasons is satisfactory. Certainly none of these motives is likely to produce great drama.

A dramatist writes plays because he passionately wants to do so. If you ask him why he wants to write plays he will probably answer, "Heaven knows!" Men express themselves in many ways—by building bridges or cathedrals, by composing operas or symphonies, by writing poems or essays. Different types of mind find expression through different channels, and one can say nothing more about the desire to write plays than that the

playwright's mind is instinctively dramatic—that is to say, he is a born dramatist, and cannot help himself.

There are many ways of looking at a thing. Imagine a mob of infuriated men and women who are holding an indignation meeting outside a factory from which they have been dismissed. The artist may look at them as the raw material for a possible picture; the psychologist may perceive an illustration of a scientific law; the politician may see them as a number of voters whose cause needs to be defended or denounced, as the case may be; the journalist sees material for a bit of sensational news or a topical photograph; and the philosopher may see in that angry crowd either the beginning of a great revolution or merely a storm in a tea-cup. One man sees life poetically, another sees it scientifically, a third sees it dramatically; but the average man sees it from all points of view at once. He can see, when the artist points it out to him, that the colours of the vegetables in Covent Garden market are really beautiful, or that a row of new houses in a suburb is depressingly ugly; but he is less sensitive to beauty and ugliness than the artist is.

In a similar way the dramatist has a genius for perceiving comedy and tragedy in daily life, and because he has an irresistible desire to express in the form of plays what he sees and feels he is able to convey to ordinary mortals his emotions and thoughts. Like the artist, he lifts life to a higher plane, and interprets truth and meaning for a world that may or may not thank him for the pleasure and revelation he brings.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLIEST DRAMA

NO one knows with certainty how and when drama began to exist. Some people have the opinion that it started as a game, like charades or mummery; others think that it was originally a sort of war-dance to celebrate a victory; but everybody agrees that in its beginning drama was closely connected with religion and the worship of the old gods. Perhaps the comedy sprang from an attempt to flatter the god of harvest, and the tragedy from a service intended to drive away the plague.

Scientists and historians teach us that few things start suddenly at a definite date, and the Darwinian would say that the great movement called drama evolved gradually and almost imperceptibly. Topsy (in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) expressed much the same idea when she declared that she never was born but she "just grewed."

The Book of Ruth and the Book of Job in the Old Testament are dramatic in form.

Drama was known among the ancient Persians, and plays were performed in courtyards; but they were distinctly connected with religious ceremonies of the day. It was known in ancient Egypt in the worship of Osiris and the rites of burial. The old Greeks had a wonderful drama, and it began with the worship of Dionysus—processions, revels, and tableaux were designed to invoke the blessing of the god of wine.

Comedy started, we are told, by acting the story of the marriage of Dionysus, and tragedy was based upon the story of his death. The word 'tragedy' actually means a 'goat-song,' and, when we remember that a goat was sacrificed on the altar to the accompaniment of a dirge we can form a dim idea of the origin of the first drama.

Later on, of course, drama became enormously important in Greece. The theatre was an immense place without a roof—a kind of hollow in the hills—and plays could be performed only by daylight. The actors looked very tiny on such a stage, and they therefore padded themselves to appear as big as possible. They spoke through a megaphone or speaking-trumpet.

The first plays consisted of nothing more than a chant by the chorus or choir, but presently a 'soloist' appeared, and the worship became a series of chants by the solitary actor and the chorus alternately. Later on a second soloist was added, and the drama became a duologue, while the chorus retired farther into the background. If the process had continued long enough the chorus might have disappeared altogether.

In Greek drama the tragedy reached greater heights than comedy. The first writer of tragedy who is worth mentioning was Æschylus. He lived about 500 B.C., and belonged to the aristocratic party. He wrote seventy plays, of which only seven survive, including *The Persians*, *The Suppliants*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, and *The Eumenides*. He won a number of prizes for his dramas, but after his defeat by Sophocles he retired to the Court of the King of Syracuse, and in his epitaph (written by himself) he refers to himself as an exile.

Sophocles is credited with having written over a hundred plays, only seven of which are in existence to-day. The best known are *Antigone*, *Electra*, *Œdipus Tyrannus*, and *Ajax*. All his finest work was done after he had reached the age of fifty-five, and he won the first prize at least twenty times, although he never won a second or a third. Sophocles was probably the first dramatist to make use of scenery on the stage, and he introduced a third actor, just as Æschylus had introduced a second. He excelled in creating character, making his people human, whereas Æschylus always made them heroic.

Euripides, the third of the great tragic dramatists, was famous for his insight into human nature and his skill in creating situation and dialogue. About seventeen or eighteen of his plays have

been preserved, the most famous being *Alcestis*, *Bacchæ*, *Medea*, *Electra*, *Hippolytus*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *The Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. He died in 406 B.C. in the Court of Archelaus, King of Macedonia.

The comedy of Greece is best represented by the writings of Aristophanes, who was born in Athens about 448 B.C., and died about 380 B.C. He wrote over fifty plays, eleven of which we still possess. Judged by modern standards, these comedies would be considered vulgar and indecent, but Aristophanes was a fearless man, and frequently made fun of the celebrities of his day. He wrote a comedy called *The Knights*, ridiculing his chief enemy, Cleon, taking the part himself because no actor had the courage to risk offending the demagogue. He satirized Socrates in *The Clouds*, and Euripides in *The Frogs*.

Other well-known plays include *The Acharnians*, *Lysistrata*, *The Wasps*, *The Birds*, and *Plutus*. His mastery of language was perfect, and he was a frequent prize-winner at the national competitions. It is interesting to notice that Aristophanes made fun of the ordinary Athenian, using him as a character in his plays—a sort of ridiculous Everyman who might be compared with the John Citizen or the Little Man of present-day cartoonists.

The Romans imitated the Greeks in their drama (as in nearly everything else), but they built theatres of wood or stone in which the plays were acted by slaves. The dramatists of Rome were poor in comparison with the Greeks, and Roman drama went from bad to worse, and finally was denounced by the Christian Church in the days of Constantine.

Among tragedians the most distinguished name is that of Seneca, who lived in the reign of Nero, but his plays were meant for reading rather than for acting. He was a Stoic philosopher and did not appeal to the ordinary crowds, who wanted coarse humour and an impressive spectacle.

Terence and Plautus were the most famous writers of comedy, and a number of their plays are still in existence. They both lived in the second century before the birth of Christ, yet their works

were preserved in monasteries and convents in various countries of Europe. *The Twins* (by Plautus) and *Phormio* (by Terence) are published in Bohn's Library, and the former is particularly interesting because its plot reappears in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*.

The Romans produced their plays at funerals and festivals, but during the period of Rome's downfall the drama degenerated into something that was little more than pantomime, with dancing, singing, and a kind of humour which would not be permitted to-day.

It should be remembered that when drama was flourishing in Greece and Rome the inhabitants of our islands were living in a state of barbarism. There was no sign of drama in England until the Middle Ages—thirteen or fourteen centuries later. Indeed, one might say that drama disappeared from Europe altogether and did not recommence until the churches began to perform little scenes from the Bible. Here, as in Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, drama has a distinctively religious origin.

At the time of the Renaissance, as every reader will know perfectly well, it became the fashion to read the classics. The long-forgotten plays of Greece and Rome were studied and imitated by our Elizabethan dramatists. As Euripides had influenced Seneca, so Seneca influenced English playwrights two thousand years later. Aristophanes was imitated by Terence and Plautus, and they passed on the drama to the friends of Shakespeare. It is for this reason that a few pages have been devoted to the drama of the ancients. We can read the Greek plays in the verse-translations made by Professor Gilbert Murray.

Before concluding this chapter it might be interesting to glance at the history of drama in Oriental countries.

Indian drama is said to have been invented by Bhārata (the "inspired sage"), and here again it is found to be religious. The earliest plays were based upon the legend of Krishna, and consisted of epic recitations about the young god and his enemies. The great period in Indian drama occurred about the year

A.D. 200 and lasted until the eleventh century. The plays were written in Sanskrit (which ceased to be a popular language soon after 300 B.C.), so that only the 'highbrows' of the country could appreciate them.

They were not intended for ordinary people. They were acted out-of-doors, and needed no scenery; and they always ended happily. The most illustrious dramatists were Kālidāsa, whose chief play is a love-idyll of great beauty, and has been translated into English, and Bhavabhūti, who wrote the adventures of Rama and a number of love-stories. All Indian drama came from the Brahmins, and it declined after the Mohammedan invasions.

Chinese drama originally consisted of songs and dances, and there is a tradition that it began about eighteen centuries before the birth of Christ. Another story says that it was invented by the Emperor Yuen-Tsung about A.D. 720. The finest period of Chinese drama was between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and the best-known play is *Pi-Pa-Ki*, by Kao-Tong-Kai, which was written about the year 1400.

Japanese drama was an amusement immensely popular with the lower orders, and may have been borrowed from China. Other authorities say that it began as a religious rite devised to charm away a volcanic depression which appeared in the year A.D. 805. The true drama of Japan began about the time of Shakespeare, and dealt with stories of national mythology. The first theatre was built at Yedo, and the most famous plays in Japanese are probably the *Nō* plays, which are tragic. The language of the Japanese plays is often coarse, especially when compared with that of Chinese and Indian drama; but one must bear in mind that the plays were written for ordinary people, and not for the small company of the refined.

Whatever theory may be found to explain the beginning of drama, we realize that acting is so deeply rooted in human nature that sooner or later it is bound to show itself in every country. If we were merely animals we should bury our dead

without ceremony of any sort; but although death is a simple thing in itself, we realize its tremendous importance, and the burying of the body has been made into an impressive ceremony with a service in the church, a procession of mourners to the grave, the singing of solemn hymns, and the playing of the *Dead March*. A military funeral with its muffled drums and Last Post is profoundly moving.

If the deceased person happens to be famous—a Prime Minister, a great general, a Poet Laureate, or a member of the royal family—the whole country goes into mourning; and children, who love acting scenes which have impressed them, have mock funerals, which presently develop into a game and continue for centuries. Many children's games, like "Poor Jennie sits a-weeping" and "London Bridge is fallen down," are probably based upon old ceremonies. If adults had not invented drama children would certainly have done so. They would have acted the wedding of a popular prince and princess until it became a recognized comedy, or a funeral until it became a familiar tragedy.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNINGS OF DRAMA IN ENGLAND

As has been already explained, drama flourished in Greece and Rome before the birth of Christ; but the first dramas in England, being purely native productions, owed nothing to any other country. They began in church during the Middle Ages, and were intended to make the sacred stories of the Bible more vivid to the common people. It is generally agreed that the very first play consisted of three or four sentences only, and was performed in Latin—the language of the Church. It was called *Quem Quæritis*, and represented the scene of the Resurrection morning, when the three Marys visited the tomb to find the body of their Lord. One of the choristers who acted the part of the angel chanted: “Whom do you seek in the sepulchre, O Christians?” The answer was: “Jesus of Nazareth Who was crucified, O heavenly ones.” Then came the triumphant chorus: “He is not here; He has risen even as He said before. Go; proclaim He has risen from the grave.”

That was all! A simple scene, lasting two minutes or so, and drama had made a beginning in England. The date of this early play was somewhere about the time of the Norman Conquest. Of course, the Church service, with its liturgy and the celebration of High Mass, lends itself to dramatization; and abundant material for plays was to be found in the Bible.

The movement grew apace. Other scenes from the Old and New Testaments were acted, and as the congregations grew bigger it became necessary to perform the plays out-of-doors. The priests and choristers were the first actors, but presently laymen were invited to assist. Drama separated from the Church in process of time, and eventually the plays were produced by the various guilds and acted in the market-places.

The first plays were called mystery plays, because they dealt with the Bible stories alone. Later on miracle plays were added, and they dealt with the lives of the saints. These were very popular, and on certain days (at Whitsuntide, for example) a whole cycle of plays was performed. Each company acted one scene and then moved on to allow another company to perform the next. Thus it was possible to see the Day of Creation, the Garden of Eden, the murder of Abel, the sacrifice of Isaac, the deluge in the time of Noah, the story of Moses, and so on, right up to the stories from the life of Christ, ending with His Crucifixion and Resurrection, and, as a sort of grand finale, the presentation of the Day of Judgment!

It is to be noticed that the plots or themes for these mystery and miracle plays were all ready-made; but the actors elaborated the various incidents, invented dialogue, and in some cases introduced broad humour for which there was no warrant in the original Biblical version. Considered as drama, the productions of the guilds were crude and comic; but there was genuine emotion in them and they created a popular taste for seeing plays.

Some of the records of these early plays are amusing, but they throw interesting sidelights on the nature of the performances. The property of the Grocers' Company at Norwich included:

2 cotes & a payre hosen for Eve, stayned.

A cote & hosen for Adam, Steyned.

A cote w^t hosen & tayle for y^e serpente, steyned. . . .

A face & heare for y^e Father.

2 hearys for Adam & Eve.

There was little scenery, however, and any attempts in this direction must have been extremely crude, something like the scenery used by Bottom and his fellow-citizens when they performed before the Duke in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The mystery plays gradually grew, and many minds collaborated in their growing. As a general rule they were communal

efforts and remind us of the charades played by children at Christmas parties.

The actors were all amateurs, but there are records of special payments to members of the company. One man received a shilling for playing Noah, and another man received tenpence for personating God. In Coventry there is an account of a man's being paid fourpence for hanging Judas (surely Judas should have hanged himself?), and another fourpence for cock-crowing on the occasion of St Peter's denial.

Various characters were elaborated out of all recognition. Noah's wife became a shrill-voiced vixen, who scolded poor old Noah in a most disrespectful manner; but perhaps he deserved it—he *would* stop to have another drink before entering the Ark! Satan, roaring and lashing his tail, speedily became a comic figure who delighted the masses, and even Herod behaved like a buffoon.

To show how popular the mystery plays were during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries it may be mentioned that there are records of their being acted in 125 towns and villages in the British Isles. The most interesting records of cycles of plays come from York, Chester, Wakefield, and Coventry. London was lagging behind the provinces in those days at any rate. The York plays numbered no less than forty-eight, and the manuscript is to be seen in the British Museum.

It is amusing to notice the various plays allocated to the guilds. Thus the Plasterers did *The Creation to the Fifth Day*, the Card-makers did *The Creation of Adam and Eve*, the Shipwrights did *The Building of the Ark*, the Fishers and Mariners did *Noah and the Flood*, the Goldsmiths did *The Adoration*, the Carpenters did *The Resurrection*, the Tailors did *The Ascension*, and the Mercers did *The Judgment Day*.

In the latter half of the fourteenth century one of the followers of Wyclif wrote a tract protesting against the demoralizing effects of these performances. Drama certainly began in the

Church, and dealt almost exclusively with sacred subjects; it was still untainted with commerce and box-office considerations; it had no love-interest, but the handling of the holy themes with so much freedom and irreverence caused the religious-minded people to shake their heads with emphatic disapproval. The tract gives a hint of what was coming. The Puritans were to suppress drama altogether as a caricature of the faith of Christendom.

Meanwhile similar things had been happening abroad. The Catholic Church used the drama to teach the common people the simple stories of the Bible, but the business of producing the plays had passed into the hands of the laity. The plays gradually grew by the addition of dialogue and amateurish attempts at humanizing the characters, until the time came when, although they were vastly appreciated by the crowds, they were disowned by the Churches.

Any reader who is sufficiently interested to care to read an old religious play should obtain a volume entitled *Everyman with Other Interludes*.¹ It contains eight miracle plays, including *The Deluge*, *The Coventry Nativity Play*, *The Cornish Miracle-play of the Three Marys*, and *The Wakefield Pageant of the Harrowing of Hell*. *Old England at Play*,² by Lynette Feasey, is also recommended as a collection of adaptations from these old plays.

The most amusing in the collection is the *Wakefield Second Shepherds' Play*, in which are depicted the three shepherds who visited the Holy Child at Bethlehem. These shepherds are obviously English farmers, and they make the usual complaints about the bad weather, the crops, and the heavy taxation. There appears a sheep-stealer named Mak, who lies down beside them, but when the others are sound asleep Mak steals a lamb, takes it home to his wife, and (on the same stage with the sleeping shepherds) has a long argument with her. He then returns to the field (about three feet away) and hears about the missing lamb. The shepherds visit Mak's house, but Mak and his wife hide the lamb in the cradle, pretending it is a new-born baby!

¹ Everyman's Library (Dent).

² Harrap.

Here is a short extract from the play itself:

- 3RD SHEPHERD. Mak, with your leave, let me give your bairn,
But sixpence.
MAK. Nay, go 'way: he sleepys.
3RD SHEPHERD. Methink he peepys.
MAK. When he wakens he weepys.
I pray you go hence.
3RD SHEPHERD. Give me leave him to kiss, and lift up the clout.
What the devil is this? He has a long snout.
1ST SHEPHERD. He is marked amiss. We wait ill about.
2ND SHEPHERD. Ill spun weft, I wis, aye cometh foul out;
Aye so:
He is like to our sheep.
3RD SHEPHERD. How, Gib, may I peep?
1ST SHEPHERD. I trow, kind will creep,
Where it may not go.
2ND SHEPHERD. This was a quaint gaud, and a far cast.
It was a high fraud.
3RD SHEPHERD. Will ye see how they swaddle
His four feet in the middle?
Saw I never in a cradle
A horned lad e'er now.

The shepherds punish Mak for his theft by tossing him in a blanket—an incident which probably created great enthusiasm in the audience. At this moment, however, the angels appear to announce the glad tidings of Bethlehem, and immediately afterwards the shepherds arrive at the manger and greet their Saviour.

It is interesting to note the anachronisms of the play. The shepherds quote Latin prayers, refer to the Paternoster (the Lord's Prayer), mention Judas and Pontius Pilate, and they seem to take it for granted that the scene of the Nativity is somewhere in England.

And yet this drama, queer as it undoubtedly was, certainly did much in the way of bringing the simple truths of the Bible home to the masses. When one comes to think about it the Church inspired nearly all the arts in their beginning—architecture, painting, music, oratory, literature in its many forms, and even

dancing—but in every case, sooner or later, there is a breaking away from the religious restraint to a wider field. This is partly due to the dissatisfaction of Church people with the instruction thus given, and partly to the desire of those taking part to be freed entirely from the limitation imposed by the religious tradition.

The mystery play died long ago, but in spite of its naïveté we are bound to regard it with respect for two reasons—viz., it was the original drama of our country, and it created popular enthusiasm for seeing plays.

Mr Marc Connelly has written a play called *Green Pastures*, which sets forth a Negro's conception of Old Testament history, and portions of the play remind one of the productions of the old trade-guilds. The Almighty Father soliloquizes in this fashion:

Dis ain't gittin' Me nowheres. All I gotta say dis yere mankind I been peoplin' my earth wid sho' ain't much. I got good min' to wipe 'em all off an' people de earth wid angels.

A conversation between Noah and his wife is strongly reminiscent of some of our English plays of the fourteenth century:

NOAH [*cordially*]. I feel congenial.

NOAH'S WIFE. An' you look it. You look jest wonderful. I wonder if you'd feel so congenial if de Lawd was to show up?

NOAH. De Lawd knows what I'm doin', don' you worry 'bout dat.

NOAH'S WIFE. I wouldn't say anythin' ag'inst de Lawd. He suttinly let us know dey'd be a change in de weather. But I bet even de Lawd wonders sometimes why He ever put you in charge.

NOAH. Well, you let de Lawd worry 'bout dat.

The law of England strictly forbids any representation of the Divine Being on the stage.¹ In a play like *The Wandering Jew*, which deals with a sacred legend, the dramatist places the first scene in an upstairs room on the day of the Crucifixion. One

¹ This does not apply to plays written before the year 1737.

hears the march of the Roman soldiers, and hears the shouts of the angry mobs in the street. Through the open window one sees the tops of the spears passing two by two, and then the Cross. . . . But the figure of Him Who carried the Cross is never seen.

In *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* Jerome introduced a "Stranger" who is undeniably intended to represent the person of Christ; yet the play passed the Censor¹ without difficulty. In *Outward Bound* the character described as "The Examiner" may be regarded either as God or as the Recording Angel; but the play has been publicly performed with great success.

There was a strong agitation against the Censor's refusal to permit the performance of *Green Pastures*. The play may be read in book-form, and has also appeared as a serial in a daily paper; but if one wishes to see it acted on the stage one must either go at the right time to America or wait until it is produced privately on a Sunday night. The film version had no such difficulties.

Similarly, a film which has been banned for public exhibition may be seen in a private exhibition by the Film Society on a Sunday afternoon. The subject of the observance of the Sabbath in this country is almost Gilbertian.

The original idea of the Churches in encouraging plays was to familiarize the congregation with sacred stories, and then to drive home a moral which should help people in daily life. As we have seen, the people were too eager to develop the stories, and the moral was either crowded out or rendered obscure.

The morality play, which began a century and a half after the first mystery, was intended to teach a lesson. It was a sermon on the stage, a moral expressed in allegory. The essential idea of the morality play was to personify the virtues and vices—Knowledge, Prudence, Faith, Hope, Love, Ignorance, Cowardice, Avarice, Gluttony, and the like.

There was a story running through the play, and the good and

¹ The stage censorship is in the hands of the Lord Chamberlain, who has his offices in St James's Palace.

evil passions were in sharp conflict; but the powers of good invariably vanquished their enemies, and the soul of man was saved. One cannot think about such a theme without recalling Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The best-known morality play is undoubtedly *Everyman*, a fine drama probably translated from the Dutch about five hundred years ago. It was first printed in England early in the sixteenth century. The story is as follows:

Everyman (representing the ordinary man) walks on the stage, and is startled by hearing the voice of Death calling him to take a long journey from which there will be no return. Everyman is filled with dismay, and protests that he is not ready. He tries to bribe Death to let him off for twelve years, but the offer is refused. Death demands that he shall go on the journey almost immediately, but he will be permitted to take a companion if he can persuade one to go with him.

Fellowship, a good friend of Everyman, next appears, and he first agrees to accompany Everyman on the journey; but he soon changes his mind and abandons Everyman to his fate. A similar thing happens when Kindred and Cousin appear, and later on Goods (whom Everyman has always loved devotedly) also declines with a jest.

Good Deeds, who is lying down bound by Everyman's sins, says she would go with him if she could move, and Knowledge offers some excellent advice. She advises Everyman to visit Confession, who is robed like a monk. Four other friends appear—namely, Discretion, Strength, Five Wits, and Beauty; but when they get near the grave Everyman is forsaken by everybody except Good Deeds, who recovered her power when Everyman took the sacrament, and bravely she goes with him into the Great Beyond. An angel appears, an angelic chorus is heard, and the soul of Everyman is received into heaven. •

The play is impressive, and the moral is unmistakable. The medieval audience was profoundly moved by such a message.

Considered as drama, *Everyman* is incomparably better than

the popular mystery which had become in many cases unconsciously comic and devoid of form. In the first place, it is evident that the morality play, unlike the mystery, required a well-constructed plot. The 'charade' element disappeared. The characters became types, arranged in contrasting groups, and the play assumed proportion.

One might suppose that allegorical figures would lack human character, but they were never mere abstractions. Idleness, Avarice, Sloth, Conscience, and Wisdom were all recognizable people in the life of the time, and the practice of using a significant name to indicate character has lasted for centuries. Sheridan introduced Sneerwell, Backbite, Surface, Crabtree, and Candour in his eighteenth-century comedies, just as later, in fiction, Thackeray gave a hint in his schoolmaster, Dr Swishtail, and in his adventuress, Becky Sharp; while Dickens followed the same example in Lord Frederick Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk.

From the point of view of the Church the only serious objection to the morality play was that the vices were often more interesting than the virtues. The good people were good enough, but they were so very dull. They made speeches in defence of piety when the demons were thwacking all and sundry with bladders filled with dried peas!

Still, the play came right in the end when the angels invited the virtues upward and drove the vices down below. The same victorious ending occurs in the cinema plays of to-day, for the good people are always rewarded, whereas the wicked are exposed and punished.

Before leaving the subject of early religious drama let us briefly sum up our impressions. The mystery and miracle plays had no chance to set out a plot or theme, but the many minds that combined to produce them did discover something about the elaboration of character and the writing of dialogue; the morality plays gave the first opportunity for the creation of a plot—for a real experiment with dramatic form. We discover also that when the stage is used to preach doctrines it ceases to be pure

drama. Almost all the arts can be employed for propaganda—didactic poetry with a strong moral, paintings to advertise Empire Trade or a special kind of soap, novels to teach political opinions, plays to advocate social reforms or to preach sermons—but the propagandist generally defeats his own purpose by overdoing it. The quality of the art is in inverse proportion to the amount of conscious preaching contained in it. If it succeeds at all it can succeed only by making the thesis subordinate to the drama of human souls in conflict.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEXT PHASE

THE mystery and miracle plays fulfilled their great purpose and then died; the morality plays continued the good work and then killed themselves. Queen Elizabeth issued an edict forbidding the drama to deal with "either matters of religion or of the governaunce of the estate of the common weal," and the ban is still in force. That is to say, a playwright is not permitted to have his play produced if the actors are required to personate sacred persons, members of the royal family,¹ or recognizable figures in the Government.

The religious and propagandist plays being extinct, playwrights began to experiment in other directions. There was a short period of transition which led to the beginning of one of the greatest periods in the history of British drama. The plays which immediately followed the morality plays have little value or interest at the present day, and we need not give them any serious attention. They may be classified as interludes and Court plays, tragi-comedies, Senecan tragedies, and chronicle plays.

The majority of the interludes and Court plays have perished. They were non-religious in subject, and the dialogue was often somewhat 'racy.' The most famous names associated with this type of drama are those of Sir Thomas More, Medwall, and John Heywood, the last being probably the best. Heywood's plays include *A Dialogue concerning Witty and Witless*; *A Mery Play between Johan Johan the Husbände, Tyb his Wife and Syr Jhān the Preest*; *A Mery Play between the Pardoner and the Frere, the Curate*

¹ The Censor prohibited the appearance of a character representing Queen Victoria in *Marigold*. One sees and hears the applauding crowd, but the royal figure remains out of sight. The ban, however, was lifted in 1937, *Victoria Regina* being the first play of this type to be performed.

and *Neybour Pratte*; and *The Playe called the Foure P.P.* All these appeared in the first half of the sixteenth century, and we have recently discovered (in 1919) a play by Medwall called *Fulgens and Lucres*.

The Four P's (or *The Playe called the Foure P.P.*) is realistic and full of fun. The characters—the Palmer, the Pedler, the Pardoner, and the Potycary—have a kind of competition in story-telling, the wager to be won by the man who can tell the biggest lie. The three last relate wonderful stories, as one may imagine, but the Palmer interrupts to remark that in the whole of his experience he has never known a woman out of patience. He is promptly adjudged the winner of the competition.

The play is written in rhymed couplets, in a metre which reminds one of the octosyllabics used by Sir Walter Scott in *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. Here is a brief specimen from the play:

[*The PARDONER is describing his visit to purgatory.*]

I knocked and was let in quickly:
But, Lord, how low the souls made curtesy;
And I to every soul again
Did give a beck them to retain,
And asked them this question then,
If that the soul of such a woman
Did late among them there appear?
Whereto they said, she came not here.
Then feared I much it was not well;
Alas, thought I, she is in hell;
For with her life I was so acquainted.
That sure I thought she was not sainted.

[*The PARDONER then goes to hell in search of MARGERY.*]

This devil and I walked arm in arm
So far, till he had brought me thither,
Where all the devils of hell together
Stood in array in such apparel,
As for that day there meetly fell.
Their horns well-gilt, their claws full clean,
Their tails well-kempt, and, as I ween,

With sothery butter their bodies anointed;
 I never saw devils so well appointed.
 The master-devil sat in his jacket,
 And all the souls were playing at racket.

[LUCIFER is only too willing for the woman to be saved.]

And if thou wouldst have twenty mo,
 Were it not for justice, they should go.
 For all we devils within this den
 Have more to do with two women,
 Than with all the charge we have beside.

[The PALMER'S winning lie is expressed thus :]

Yet have I seen many a mile,
 And many a woman in the while.
 Not one good city, town, or borough
 In Christendom, but I have been thorough,
 And this I would ye understand,
 I have seen women five hundred thousand :
 And oft with them have long time tarried.
 Yet in all places where I have been,
 Of all the women that I have seen,
 I never saw nor knew in my conscience
 Any one woman out of patience.

The tragi-comedies were mainly derived from foreign drama, which was being eagerly studied at this time, and here we discover the first connexion between English plays and the old classics of Greece and Rome. The Latin works of Plautus and Terence supplied legends and complicated plots, but it was clear that the drama would have to be divided into comedies and tragedies. The mixture of the two was artistically false.

And here, perhaps, a small digression may be permitted since it illustrates the point. When Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* was produced nearly twenty years ago several critics objected that some of the scenes were comic, while others were grimly tragic. They were answered by other critics that life itself is like that—especially in Ireland. If life mixes comedy and tragedy at random surely a playwright who aims at reality must follow the example? In the sixteenth century, however, the difference

between comedy and tragedy was not merely one of incident: it was a difference of style. Tragedy was full of rhetorical speeches and contained little action, but comedy demanded the greatest freedom of speech and a great deal of lively action. It was absurd to try to combine the two conflicting types of drama in one.

The chronicle plays were enormously popular, but most of them have been lost. They were mainly attempts to present the lives and deaths of kings (or other great men) in a series of scenes which revealed their characters. Shakespeare himself used the themes of the chronicle plays in historical plays like *King John* and *Richard III*, but *Henry V*, *King John*, and *King Lear* were used by playwrights before Shakespeare. A few years ago John Drinkwater made his name as a dramatist by chronicle plays like *Abraham Lincoln*, *Oliver Cromwell*, and *Robert E. Lee*, and Bernard Shaw treated Joan of Arc in a similar manner in *Saint Joan*.

The plays which were performed at the Universities and in the Inns of Court were generally based upon the classical drama. The boys of St Paul's School acted Terence and Plautus before Cardinal Wolsey. But the common people had little patience for plays of this type, and flocked to see comedies in which there was sentiment and romance, wit and humour.

One of the great landmarks at this period was the production of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (about 1550), which has an elaborate plot (like the classical plays), but was transformed into pure comedy of English life in the country. It was first produced at Cambridge, but the name of the author is unknown. He is referred to as "Mr S.," and all that we can say about the gentleman is that he found his inspiration in life as well as in Terence.

The good work of creating English comedy was continued by Udall, who was the headmaster of Eton and later on of Westminster School. His *Ralph Roister Doister* is not so coarse in language as *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. There is no trace of the morality spirit in either play, and both are written in rhymed metre. The influence of Terence is perceptible in Udall's work, and compared with Shakespeare it would be voted dull; but one

must praise the play because its spirit of English comedy reveals to us how drama was becoming fresh in dialogue and characterization, growing into that wonderful thing—the Elizabethan comedy. It is noteworthy that Udall was the first playwright to divide his plays into acts on the classical models.

The use of verse, especially of rhymed verse, imposed a restriction on the free movement of drama, but the man who was destined to give the world a new kind of prose, peculiarly suitable for drama, appeared about this time. He was John Lyly, the author of a novel called *Euphues* and of some half-dozen plays. Lyly's comedies were written for performance by children in the Chapel Royal, and hence they have a delicacy and refinement of language which is lacking in the other plays of the time.

The dramatist had a habit of jumping from verse to prose, the verse being used to express the world of beautiful unreality, and prose for the speech of reality. Shakespeare imitated this idea in several of his plays, notably in *As You Like It*. It is noticeable that in *Julius Cæsar* the common people talk prose, while the patricians deliver themselves in verse; and similarly in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the citizens of Athens speak prose, whereas the superior characters (including the lovers and the fairies) speak in verse.

The comedy of this period was full of incident and realistic in expression; the tragedy strove to retain the dignity and form of the Latin plays which were now the rage all over Europe. The time was drawing near when the two styles would become fused into one—the glorious age of Elizabethan drama—when (as one famous writer put it) England became “a nest of singing birds.”

CHAPTER V

THE RENAISSANCE

IF we are to believe the experts popular notions are generally wrong; and even when they are not completely wide of the mark they are only half true. We seem to spend the second half of our lives in unlearning what we were taught in the first half.

Young children often complain that history is a dull subject in school. They are not interested in slow-crawling political changes and increasing tendencies towards social reform. They crave for definite events and exciting incidents. They like hearing about battles, for example; but nowadays the educationists object to glorifying war and desire the teachers to devote more time to the victories of peace. Children enjoy the little anecdotes about famous people—about King Alfred and the cakes, about Blondel's singing songs outside the castles to find out where Richard I was imprisoned, about Robin Hood and Maid Marian, or William Tell and the apple. But the greatest authorities tell us that these stories are false, either in part or altogether. Human beings have an instinct to dramatize events—to add touches of romance, to heighten comedy, to deepen tragedy, and, above all, to emphasize contrasts.

This preliminary remark is intended to introduce the great subject of the Renaissance. We have all read in our history books about the Turkish invasion of Europe, the downfall of Constantinople, the scattering of the scholars about Europe, and the consequent revival of learning in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Holland, and eventually in England. The oldest universities were founded, and in a short time schools and colleges sprang up all over Western Europe. It became the fashion to read the classics, and there followed a period of Renaissance which expressed itself in many ways. Italy became the centre of a revival of painting. Germany adopted a new religion, Spain

began to explore the unknown world, and England awoke to the glories of literature.

It is popularly thought that during the Middle Ages the world was living in darkness which suddenly became illuminated with the glorious dawn of the Renaissance. It was like the change from prison gloom to the daylight of liberation. So much for the commonly accepted idea of the Renaissance. It contains a certain percentage of truth, but it has been dramatized out of all proportion.

To begin with, the change was not nearly so abrupt as we are apt to imagine. The sixteenth century was not marked by a drastic change and severance from preceding centuries. The Renaissance began before the downfall of Constantinople, and would have happened in any case. Men were bound to find a pleasure in self-expression, to emancipate themselves from the traditions of the past, but the Middle Ages were not so blind to beauty as we are inclined to think.

The Langford Rood, the reliefs at Chichester, the twelfth-century crucifix at Salzburg, the Chapter-house at Salisbury, the Madonnas of the Schnütgen collection at Cologne, the Angel Choir at Lincoln, the figure-relief of Bamberg, Naumburg and Halberstadt—to take a few English and German examples only—are *chefs d'œuvre* that fill one with amazement. The triumphs of Latin Romanesque and Gothic it would be as ridiculous to belittle as it is to say that before the Renaissance European thought was in chains. No sensible scholars believe in the *clichés* of darkness and light. . . . But what we have to recognize is that under certain dissolving forces corporate effort in the service of a universal ideal broke down, that institutional art (if the expression be permitted) gave place to the art of the individual pioneer in his workshop, that the tram-lines came to an end and men were borne into any unknown country, relying on their own strength and fertility of invention. Walter Raleigh put the point clearly: "The self-assertion of the humanists was open and unashamed; man was to train himself like a race-horse, to cultivate himself like a flower, that he might arrive soul and body to such perfection as mortality might covet."

So writes Professor E. F. Jacob in his excellent little book on *The Renaissance*, but, unfortunately for our present purpose, he does not deal with the literary aspects of the period.

Perhaps we might summarize our impression by saying that the Renaissance came to Europe as spring comes to England—a steadily increasing light and warmth, an occasional day which glows like summer, many days which are gloomy and depressingly chilly, and then, at last, a wonderful time of blue skies, vividly green foliage, and singing birds. In all the literature of the Elizabethans—poetry, romance, and drama—there is a feeling of exultation and inspiration which reminds one of an English May.

The popular notion of Shakespeare is that he stands alone—a gigantic figure of incredible genius, the greatest dramatist which the world has ever produced. It is probably true that he is the greatest genius; but it is not true to suppose that there were no other great men near him, or that everything he wrote was sublime.

Shakespeare stands out above his contemporaries as Mont Blanc out-tops the other Alpine heights—the greatest of them all, undoubtedly, but surrounded by other great men who would be extolled if Shakespeare did not overshadow them. Shakespeare owed much to his fellow-playwrights. He collaborated with them, quite frequently borrowed their plots, learned their technique, and took the fullest advantage of their discoveries. His early plays were crude in form, and some of his plots were so artificial that one can only laugh at them. One perceives the hand of a beginner who is experimenting and groping his way towards a greater perfection.

Yet some of the literary critics invariably speak of Shakespeare as a paragon whose every line was ecstatically beautiful. "Milton was great," declares an enthusiast, "and Dante was great; but Shakespeare could have lifted Milton with one hand and Dante with the other." If such a judgment contains an element of truth (and perhaps it does) it is nevertheless

false to think of Shakespeare as a Gulliver in the land of Lilliput.

Before this time the genius was a solitary figure appearing perhaps once in a century. Chaucer, for example, dominates the fourteenth century, and for a long period before and after him there seemed to be a dearth of poets. But in the stimulating atmosphere of the Renaissance there were literally dozens of poets and dozens of dramatists. The inspiration of the time was unescapable, and under its influence even the unknown clergymen who translated the Bible into the English of the Authorized Version achieved great literature.

Nor must we assume that England was alone in finding expression through literature. The rediscovery of the plays of Greece and Rome wrought great changes in the drama of many countries. In Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France there was manifested a tremendous enthusiasm for drama. A Spanish writer, Lope de Vega, is said to have written no fewer than 1800 plays, and Cervantes was busily engaged in writing *The Adventures of Don Quixote* at this time.

The dramatists who helped to prepare the way for Shakespeare were Lyly, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nashe, Marlowe, and Kyd. There were others, of course, but these names are outstanding.

Lyly was born ten years before Shakespeare, and we have already referred to his new style of prose. He wrote eight plays, several of which were inspired by his love of the classics. Lyly was a 'highbrow' of his day, and he was intensely dissatisfied with the comedy of crude realism; he created a style of play in which he could combine the best features of classic, realistic, and romantic drama. Mr H. F. Rubinstein writes:

His main contribution to English drama was a prose style, Italianate in origin, compound of the verbal quibbles, puns, and allusions of a subtle intellect not very fastidious, but refined by an ear for word-music.

The quibbles, puns, and word-jugglery which are so common in the earlier plays of Shakespeare (as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example) were one of the fashions of the day. The trick of making the heroine and the clown banter quip for quip—rather like a game of tennis—is well known. It can be rather amusing as an exhibition of wit, but one soon tires of it. Puns are avoided by playwrights to-day, though they are still popular in the backchat and repartee of the music-hall comedian.

Peele (like Lyly, Greene, Lodge, Nashe, and Marlowe) was a university man, and obtained a degree at Oxford. He was extremely versatile, and among his plays we find a pastoral, a romantic tragedy, a chronicle history, a romantic satire, and a mystery play. Peele's power of construction was slight, but he had a gift for writing blank verse, and he certainly had a romantic imagination.

Greene is famous for his comedies, and Shakespeare's indebtedness to him is obvious. The mingling of reality and fantasy—courtiers meeting fairies, for instance—contains the essential spirit of the romantic comedy. In his *Friar Bacon* we find three interweaving worlds (magic, aristocracy, citizens), which immediately reminds one of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the Gilbert and Sullivan opera *Iolanthe*. Greene's heroines, although they do not rival the Rosalinds, Juliets, Mirandas, Imogens, Silvias, Helenas, Violas, and Perditas of Shakespeare, are worth noticing as forerunners of that type of heroine. They are real women, but they are delightful characters, possessing glamour and enchantment.

Lodge and Nashe were less important figures, but Marlowe is supremely important. His *Tamburlaine the Great*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta* are works of a genius who was utterly fearless, and who had within him the "stuff of high tragedy." It is difficult, in a few words, to estimate Marlowe's contribution to tragic drama. Before his day tragedy was always regarded as a warning against sin, and was portrayed to teach the audience a lesson. (One thinks of the morality plays here.) But Marlowe

showed that the central character of a tragedy may be a heroic figure who is crushed in a brave fight against overwhelming odds. Moreover, it had always been the fashion to restrict tragedy to royal personages, but Marlowe showed how a German alchemist or a moneylender may be just as noble in conflict as any king or prince of the blood. *The Jew of Malta* compels us to think of Shylock (in *The Merchant of Venice*), and the theme of *Doctor Faustus* was used by Goethe in his *Faust*.

Marlowe's blank verse rose to great heights, and his treatment of passion is in the grand manner. Everybody should know the passage from *Doctor Faustus* which describes Helen of Troy:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!

.

O, thou art fairer than the evening air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.

Professor Allardyce Nicoll says:

With Marlowe we are in the presence of a distinctly passionate but unbalanced genius, a man lacking the serenity and the calm-eyed power which gave to Shakespeare a large part of his greatness. With his insistence upon the tremendous emotions of these supermen heroes, Marlowe, moreover, tended to lose sight of the minor figures in his tragedies. . . . Always Shakespeare has given more of individuality to his lesser figures than has Marlowe. Horatio, Cassio, Banquo, and Kent have independent existence.¹

It should be remembered that Marlowe died at the age of twenty-nine, Lyly wrote nothing after thirty-seven, Greene died at thirty-two, Peele at thirty-nine, and Kyd at thirty-eight.

¹ *British Drama* (Harrap).

They were all young men, and if Shakespeare had stopped writing at, say, thirty-five we should have had none of his great plays.

Kyd's most famous work was *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is modelled upon the Latin tragedy of Seneca, but by his wonderful mastery of technique and his inborn sense of the theatre the dramatist filled the play with thrilling incident. Kyd's sense of construction is superior to Marlowe's, and his command of blank verse is remarkable. *The Spanish Tragedy* has many points of resemblance to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It is a play of revenge; it begins with the ghost of the murdered man; the widow falls in love with Horatio, who is strangled. Horatio's father secures his revenge by a play within a play; and so on. The tragedy is a first-class thriller, with no less than ten violent deaths, and as a final scene the hero bites out his tongue and flings it away with a gesture!

These plays are not often performed to-day, but nevertheless they are exceedingly important in the history of drama. The ancient Greek dramatists influenced the drama of Rome; and both Greece and Rome helped to form the drama of England, France, Spain, and Italy during the time of the Renaissance. The ten tragedies of *Seneca* were published in one volume in 1581, and inspired our tragic playwrights. Probably the very first English tragedy was *Gorboduc*, which was performed before Queen Elizabeth in the Inner Temple, and in this play blank verse was used for the first time. But the resemblance between *Gorboduc* and the Roman play *Thebais* is too close to be dismissed. The English tragedy was based upon the Roman, just as the English comedy *Ralph Roister Doister* was an adaptation of a Roman comedy by Plautus.

We notice, moreover, how greatly Shakespeare was indebted to his immediate predecessors. His prose reminds us of Lyly, his romantic comedy recalls Peele and Greene, his tragedy owes much to Marlowe and Kyd, and he found his themes everywhere.

And we have still to recognize that Shakespeare was greatly influenced by his more intimate friends—Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and a crowd of others who met at the Mermaid Tavern for the refreshment of body and soul.

CHAPTER VI

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WE know very little indeed about Shakespeare, and the facts of which we are certain are not particularly interesting. He was born in Stratford-on-Avon in April 1564, and died there in 1616. The house which is his reputed birthplace has been preserved as a museum, but New Place (where he died) was pulled down in the eighteenth century. Visitors to Stratford generally visit the church where Shakespeare, his wife, and his little son lie buried; and it is a recognized part of the programme to stroll as far as Ann Hathaway's cottage, where Shakespeare's wife lived.

The marriage took place when the poet was eighteen and his bride twenty-six. They had two daughters, Susanna and Judith, and a son who died before he was twelve, so that if there are any descendants of Shakespeare alive to-day it is hardly likely that they will bear the same name.

A year or two after his marriage—that is, when he was about twenty-one—Shakespeare left Stratford and went to London. There are dozens of legends about his doings, but it seems fairly certain that he joined the Earl of Leicester's company in Shore-ditch. He acted in various theatres, composed an enormous amount of poetry, improved other people's plays, wrote original plays of his own, and, finally, after making sufficient money to retire, he bought a house in his native place, and died there at the age of fifty-two.

There is nothing exciting in all this. Ben Jonson described Shakespeare as "gentle," and says that he had an "open and free nature." If he had been less modest we might have heard more about him. After all, if a man writes three dozen great plays during twenty years of acting, rehearsing, and producing it is improbable that he will have much spare time for mixing with the world.

We can speculate about Shakespeare's character, of course; in fact, we can hardly help speculating about him. Some scholars have come to the conclusion that he was moody, easily hurt, unhappy at heart. He must have been abnormally sensitive to his surroundings, and therefore he probably went to extremes of gaiety and misery. He was "as putty to all men." His fondness for the meditative and rather melancholy philosopher in his plays (like Jaques in *As You Like It*) has caused people to suppose that he himself was cast in that mould. In nearly all his plays that particular type of character emerges and propounds his pessimistic ideas about "life's brief candle" and "such stuff as dreams are made on." In *Hamlet* the same figure is made the central character, and is regarded as the dramatist's portrait of himself.

On the other hand, Mr John Masefield's opinion is different:

Life took thought for Shakespeare. She bred him, mind and bone, in a twofold district of hill and valley, where country life was at its best and the beauty of England at its bravest. Afterwards she placed him where there was the most and the best life of his time. Work so calm as his can only have come from a happy nature, happily fated. Life made a golden day for her golden soul.

It may be argued that Shakespeare must have been at peace within his own heart in order to accomplish the enormous amount of work that he achieved; but it can also be argued that Shakespeare worked with feverish energy because he was desperate. Psychologists tell us that the majority of men of genius are driven to work by conflict either within themselves or without. They also assure us that every artist reveals his emotions, consciously or unconsciously, in his work. Thus Shakespeare may have been madly in love when he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, madly jealous when he wrote *Othello*; when he was smarting with ingratitude his feelings possibly found relief in *King Lear*, and when he recovered his tranquillity he may have written *The Tempest*. If this theory be true we ought to be able to infer

something of Shakespeare's inner history from a contemplation of his plays.

His nature must have been strangely complex, for he found within himself the passion of Romeo, the melancholy of Jaques, the rollicking humour of Falstaff, the heroism of Henry V, the moodiness of Hamlet, the misanthropy of Timon, and the serenity of Prospero. His understanding of human nature of all types was profound and subtle, and his skill in depicting character has never been surpassed. His creations are familiar to everybody, and even the people who never see the plays know Lady Macbeth and Portia, Dogberry and Touchstone, Malvolio and Sir Toby Belch.

In the same way people who never read Shakespeare know hundreds of quotations from his works, for, like proverbs, they have become a part of our daily speech. If one considers *Hamlet* alone one instantly recognizes such familiar phrases as :

For this relief much thanks.

A little more than kin, and less than kind.

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

That it should come to this!

He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.

Marked at all points.

More in sorrow than in anger.

And to the manner born.

A custom more honour'd in the breach than the observance.

I could a tale unfold.

Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.

O my prophetic soul!

What a falling-off was there!

One may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Brevity is the soul of wit.

Though this be madness, yet there's method in 't.

Give us a taste of your quality.

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil.

From whose bourn no traveller returns.

Conscience doth make cowards of us all.

Tear a passion to tatters.

It out-herods Herod.

Cudgel thy brains.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

A hit, a very palpable hit.

A dog will have his day.

These extracts are not quoted because they have any great poetic beauty; they are set out to show how thoroughly Shakespeare's casual expressions have passed into the currency of everyday speech. If one wanted to find passages of beauty the task would be easy, for they are scattered through all his works. Everybody has been moved by such lyrical outbursts as:

The morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.

O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day.

Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:

My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberest
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all-arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal throned by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.

One could fill a book with poetical passages from Shakespeare without the slightest difficulty. There are arguments sometimes as to whether Shakespeare is greater as a poet or as a dramatist, but the glorious thing about him is that he is supreme in both.

Marlowe and Kyd were fine writers of tragedy, just as Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher were fine writers of comedy; but Shakespeare excelled them all in both tragedy and comedy. His genius seems to be universal.

What do people enjoy most when they see a play by Shakespeare? One person appreciates the exquisite music of his poetry; another is carried away by the incidents of the drama, and the skill with which they are presented; a third admires the 'nuggets' of wisdom which fall from the lips of his characters, and the philosophy of life which underlies the whole play; a fourth finds his chief delight in the dramatist's godlike ability to create characters.

This power of characterization cannot be taught: a man either has it or has it not. Second-rate dramatists are content to people the stage with conventional figures—the tyrannical father, the long-suffering mother, the misunderstood genius, the well-dressed scoundrel, the beautiful lady who is so heartless, the heroine who combines all the virtues. They use the same standardized types over and over again, and none of them seems to have any existence outside the plot. They are like puppets or marionettes worked by strings.

But Shakespeare's characters, including the minor ones, have a vitality of their own, and no two are alike. There are a dozen or more clowns in Shakespeare, but they are all different. There are a score or more of heroines, and they are all wonderful, but no one would say that Juliet is Rosalind under another name, or that Portia was twin-sister to Silvia, or Hero the duplicate of Imogen, or Miranda the least bit like Imogen. Shakespeare has an uncanny power of understanding human nature. Criminologists are astounded at his truthfulness in depicting the moods of Macbeth or Cassius or Richard III.

Artists cannot paint the human body until they have made a thorough study of anatomy, and, in a similar way, dramatists cannot portray the human character unless they have an instinctive knowledge of psychology. They must have had experience of the whole gamut of emotions, and the heart of a villain must be understood as fully as the heart of a saint. It is difficult to describe either without making them seem inhuman or mere caricatures.

Stevenson understood men, but failed when he attempted to describe women; Meredith was wonderful when he described women, but his men are less impressive. Dickens could depict a vulgar female like Mrs Squeers or Mrs Gamp, but when he tried to give us a heroine he created colourless creatures like Little Nell, Little Dorrit, Florence Dombey, and Agnes Wickfield.

But Shakespeare stands alone in his mastery of all kinds of

people, old and young, good and bad, rich and poor, royal and artisan, male and female; and no other dramatist either in England or abroad has had anything like the same range or the same power to create character.

Shakespeare worked to produce plays to suit a particular theatre, and probably to suit a particular company at a time when women's parts were acted by boys; he exploited his knowledge of stage-technique to please his audience—to give them plenty of action, thrilling situations, entanglements, suspense, and full scope for rhetoric which the Elizabethans loved. Yet in spite of the limitations imposed upon him he contrived to write plays which satisfy human needs in all ages: he is more than a great Elizabethan—he is one of the immortals.

If Shakespeare is so great a genius how do we account for the fact that he is so rarely performed to-day? Why do the West End theatres constantly produce third-rate plays—sentimental musical comedies, naughty French farces, or 'crook' plays about Chicago?

Before the war the only theatres in London which regularly produced Shakespeare were the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells, both outside the fashionable West End and therefore less heavily rented. The West End theatres have enormous expenses, and no play will be attempted unless there is a good chance of having a full house for weeks. One must not blame the theatrical managers, therefore, for the neglect of Shakespeare. The real fault lies with the public, or with that section of the public which is in the habit of patronizing the theatre.

Now comes the more difficult question, why the public does not appreciate Shakespeare. It cannot be that the themes do not interest the twentieth century. If a man goes to see a modern thriller because he likes a few murders, why does he keep away from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, both of which are crammed with crime? If he goes to a sentimental play because he likes a charming heroine, why does he not see *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night*? Has any modern play a more delightful heroine than Rosalind

or Viola? Shakespeare's themes are the eternal themes—crime, ambition, jealousy, vengeance, love, hate—and they will be popular as long as human nature remains.

Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that modern people do not like verse. It is true that actors and actresses often speak the lines badly, but the whole idea of dialogue in blank verse is alien to the mind, and spoils that sense of reality without which no play can move the emotions. As Tony Weller put it, "Poetry's unnat'ral."

But that explanation is not satisfactory, for when we study the drama of the present day we generally find that the good play, written in prose, has a lamentably short run, while an inferior play may run for years. The sad truth is that the ordinary public fails to appreciate the best in drama, and becomes frantically enthusiastic over a play which is cheap and flashy.

It is discouraging, of course, but it happens in all kinds of art. The musician will tell you that the public likes 'tripe,' and can't appreciate 'good stuff'; the novelist knows that the 'best-seller' is often rubbish; the statesman knows that a politician with a few platform tricks and a gift for self-advertisement can sway the multitudes. Our creative geniuses often live in poverty and die in obscurity, while other men and women who are, as the popular phrase goes, "not fit to black their boots" win fame and fortune.

Is there any remedy for this melancholy state of affairs? There is one—only one. The general public needs to be educated in taste and judgment. We need to learn the difference between a real gem and a sham, between genuine old furniture and a fake, between good literature and cheap imitation, between an honourable man and an impostor, between competent drama written with imagination and a competent 'show' written to please the tired business men who sit in the most expensive seats.

CHAPTER VII

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS FRIENDS

IT would be an excellent idea to spend half a year in reading the whole of Shakespeare's works, but in the usual editions the plays are printed in the wrong order. *The Tempest*, which is placed first, was in reality one of the last plays which Shakespeare wrote. It is followed by one of his earliest—*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and then by *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was written much later. The explanation of the arrangement is that the plays are classified as comedies, historical plays, and tragedies.

There are generally thirty-seven plays in the volume of Complete Works. During Shakespeare's lifetime about fifteen plays were printed (in quartos) from copies used in the theatre, and they are full of blunders. As far as we know the author never supervised the printing of any of his plays, and scholars have been arguing about the meaning of certain lines ever since.

In the First Folio edition, printed in 1623 (seven years after his death), there are over twenty plays which were then published for the first time. There are thirty-six plays in the volume. *Pericles*, which was printed in quarto a few years later, and was included in the Third Folio, does not appear in the First.

The difficulty about Shakespeare's plays is to decide precisely what he did write. It was a common habit of dramatists in Elizabethan days to help one another. The majority of scholars are convinced that *Titus Andronicus* was not Shakespeare's work at all; they tell us that John Fletcher wrote the greater part of *King Henry VIII*, assisted by another dramatist (probably Massinger); they explain that *Troilus and Cressida* is only a rough draft of a play, a few scenes being finished, but the play as a whole being unfit for production: and the first part of *King Henry VI* is a badly written chronicle play, the work of a couple of 'backs' whom Shakespeare may have supervised. There are passages of

unmistakable Shakespeare in all these doubtful plays; but it is false to judge Shakespeare by treating them as his work, and it is absurd to pretend, as many people do, that everything in the volume of Shakespeare's works is magnificent.

Thousands of school-children learn by heart Wolsey's speech beginning, "Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness," imagining that it is a piece of Shakespeare. But a literary expert recognizes in a moment that the greater part of the speech is not Shakespearian at all; in fact, one can tell the very line where Shakespeare took up the pen—"Never so truly happy . . ." It is certainly a mistake to suppose that the thirty-six or thirty-seven plays are pure, undiluted Shakespeare.

Shakespeare borrowed his stories from other people—from *Plutarch's Lives*, *Holinshed's Chronicle*, and similar sources. *Romeo and Juliet* was a popular story before Shakespeare wrote the play, and he had read Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* as well as other versions in prose. *As You Like It* is based upon a novel *Rosalynde, or Euphues Golden Legacie*, by Lodge. *The Comedy of Errors* came from a Latin play by Plautus. *All's Well That Ends Well* was suggested by a tale in the *Decamerone*.

One might continue for pages, telling how Shakespeare found a plot here, another there, an idea somewhere else. It is interesting to catch a glimpse of the working of his mind, but the fact that Shakespeare borrowed his plots does not make the slightest difference to his position as a supreme dramatist. Some of the stories are quite incredible, and some (as Mr St John Ervine said of *The Merchant of Venice*) are quite "silly"; but the stories are only the raw material. If Shakespeare can create a fine drama out of a "silly" story, and compel one to accept an incredible plot by the sheer skill of his craftsmanship, it matters very little where the idea originated.

There is one other matter of dispute about Shakespeare which might be mentioned at this point. The genius that is manifested in the plays is so astonishing that many people cannot bring themselves to believe that it was done by a poorly educated man

from a small country town. They argue that we are quite wrong in imagining that Shakespeare wrote the plays: they were written by some learned gentleman who did not wish his association with the stage to become known. They quote Jonson's remark about his friend that he had "small Latin and less Greek," and believe that the real author was Francis Bacon, or a German Count, or, as some one has brightly suggested, another gentleman of the same name!

There is no need to say much about the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, except that it is continuing to this day, and both parties are absolutely certain that they are right. Many ardent admirers of the plays pay visits of homage to the tomb of Bacon, near St Albans, just as others go to Stratford or to the public-house where Shakespeare once lodged near Cheapside. The Baconians believe that the real author left a secret cipher disclosing his name within the plays themselves. One enthusiast quotes an extract from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Act IV, Scene I) where a Welshman, Sir Hugh Evans, tries to quote the Latin "*Hunc, hanc, hoc,*" and mispronounces it "Hung, hang, hog," whereupon Mistress Quickly says "'Hang-hog' is Latin for bacon, I warrant you." But by this kind of argument one might prove that Dickens wrote the novels of Thackeray, or *vice versa*. If one happens to notice that in Psalm XLVI the forty-sixth word from the beginning is 'shake' and the forty-sixth from the end is 'spear,' are we to argue that Shakespeare wrote the Psalms, ingeniously inserting a clue to his name?

Ben Jonson, one of Shakespeare's closest friends, was a great scholar and knew the classics well. Is it incredible that Shakespeare heard many old tales from his friend, and used them with extraordinary skill? In his *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* Bernard Shaw imagines that Shakespeare spent his life, notebook in hand, snapping up "unconsidered trifles," and that the famous sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth* was suggested by Queen Elizabeth herself, who was conscience-stricken by the death of Mary Queen of Scots!

The great thing one has to realize is that a story in itself is nothing: the dramatic treatment of it is everything. When one remembers that Shakespeare, apart from his craftsmanship and his knowledge of the stage, was also a great poet, much of the difficulty disappears. Like an alchemist, he had the supreme gift of turning everything into gold.

As an example of the way in which the Elizabethans collaborated in their work, there is a play in the British Museum called *Sir Thomas More*. The original text is in the handwriting of Anthony Munday, but there are additions in no less than five other hands, referred to by scholars as *A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E*. Now *A* has been identified as belonging to Thomas Chebbble, *B* may be Heywood, and *C* may be Kyd; but whether *D* is Shakespeare or not is still a matter for furious dispute. Dr Tannenbaum, a famous American scholar, claims to have discovered twenty-five points of difference between the handwriting of *D* and that of Shakespeare.

Such controversies may be exciting to the Elizabethan experts, but the ordinary man and woman do not care twopence either way. The dispute has been mentioned to show how the playwrights of the time revised one another's work, little guessing the trouble they would cause three centuries later.

We are always in danger of regarding Shakespeare as a sort of god, creating drama that belongs to all time, standing aloof from ordinary men and women in Olympian majesty. It is well to remember that Shakespeare was mortal, and that we can perceive the gradual evolution of his personality in the changing and ripening of his style. Moreover, as a producer of plays he had to cater for the needs of the public and give them the type of play which they demanded. He had to bear in mind the limitations of his stock company and the shortcomings of the Elizabethan stage.

His early plays, like *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Comedy of Errors*, have plots which are so artificial that they merely amuse us to-day. The former deals with a king and three lords who fall

in love with a princess and three ladies, each to each (as Euclid would say), without any of the complications such as are introduced into *A Midsummer Night's Dream* later on. The latter deals with twin aristocrats and their twin 'valets' and all the entanglements which would be involved in the confusion, neither master being able to pick out his own servant, neither servant knowing which is his own master. Add to this the circumstance that one of the masters is gay, fond of wine, and a lover of jolly company, while the other is a studious man devoted to his books, and then—as a further complication—that one is married and the other single, and the reader can guess something of the situations that will naturally follow.

The Taming of the Shrew and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* may be described as farcical comedies, whereas *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* are romantic comedies, rather like the plays written by Peele, Greene, and Lyly. Throughout these plays one notices the increasing skill with which Shakespeare handles his plots and creates character. *Much Ado About Nothing*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure* are comedies, but there is a tragic vein running through them, and they remind us of the tragi-comedy of Beaumont and Fletcher, whose influence is more apparent in *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Pericles*.

As a little sidelight upon Shakespeare's skill in adapting himself to his company a famous scholar has suggested that Shakespeare had to introduce a pair of heroines into the plays. They are Julia and Silvia in one play, Hermia and Helena in another, Rosalind and Celia in a third, Olivia and Viola in a fourth, Hero and Beatrice in a fifth, and so on. It may be mentioned, too, that women were not permitted on the stage in Elizabethan times, and the parts had to be taken by boys whose voices had not broken. This may explain Shakespeare's fondness for dressing his heroine in boy's clothes: Viola, Rosalind, Portia, Jessica, and Imogen all adopted male attire for certain scenes.

If we except the historical plays, which were really chronicle plays with ready-made plots, there is only one tragedy of Shakespeare's written before 1600. His greatest tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Coriolanus*—were written when the dramatist's powers had come to full fruition. We may argue, as some critics do, that the poet went through a tragic phase of life, the secret of which is unknown to us; but it is comforting to realize that when he wrote *The Tempest* he had recovered his serenity and saw life from a loftier standpoint. The first tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, may have been written to express the passion of a beautiful but hopeless love-story.

On the other hand, we may argue that Shakespeare was merely supplying the public with the plays which were popular at the time. There was a great demand for plays of revenge and plays of sheer horror; but when we compare Shakespeare's treatment of such subjects in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* with the work of Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford and Shirley, we realize how immeasurably greater is his genius, how much deeper his insight into the human heart, how much vaster the sweep of his imagination.

William Archer declared that Shakespeare stood head and shoulders above all his contemporaries, and no doubt he did; but it may be advisable to give a brief consideration to some of the many other playwrights who were working with him.

Ben Jonson, of course, stands out as a great writer of comedies. He was a man of strong character, pugnacious by temperament—he once killed an actor in a duel in Hoxton Fields—and very fond of lively company. He was one of the jolly club that met, with Shakespeare, at the Mermaid Tavern, and—like the great Doctor Johnson in the eighteenth century—he was a sort of autocrat of the party. He was what we should term a lively 'card,' and many anecdotes were always going the rounds about his witty remarks or his wild behaviour. His best-known plays are *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *Volpone* (1605), *The Silent Woman* (1609), and *The Alchemist* (1610). His *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) was not

one of his greatest, although it is often quoted. The early comedies were dazzlingly witty and fantastic, but in *Bartholomew Fair* he tried his hand at realistic comedy, and although the portraits are comic, the play is weaker in construction and less effective than its predecessors. Jonson made several attempts at tragedy, but they were failures.

Fletcher was probably the most typical Elizabethan of the time. He was a prolific writer who understood the technique of the theatre perfectly. He wrote romantic comedies, tragi-comedies, pastorals, and did much to make Spanish plays familiar on the English stage. His character was virile and fearless, and he died of the plague in the year 1625, when he was about forty-nine. He and Beaumont lived and worked together, and they produced over fifty plays. There is a story that they once had a fierce argument in an inn concerning the plot of a play they were writing, and as they were overheard discussing the killing of the king the pair were arrested on a charge of treason!

Their best-known comedies include *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Spanish Curate*, *The Scornful Lady*, and *Wit without Money*. Their tragedies include *A King and No King*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Valentinian*, and *Thierry and Theodoret*. *The Faithful Shepherdess* is a pastoral tragi-comedy in verse.

In *The Tamer Tamed* Fletcher continues the story of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and shows how a high-spirited girl declines to be bullied into submission by a man of the type of Petruchio. The Induction to Shakespeare's play, introducing Christopher Sly, was clearly borrowed from a Spanish play by Calderon, just as *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was influenced by Don Quixote. Spanish drama seems to have made a big impression upon Elizabethan playwrights at this time.

But to return to Shakespeare's contemporaries; there are still a number of famous names which have not been mentioned—Chapman, Dekker, Middleton, Heywood, Massinger, Webster, Ford, and others.

Chapman was an ardent disciple of Ben Jonson (as in *May Day*

and *All Fools*), but he is known to most of us for his translation of Homer, not, be it confessed, because we read the translation, but because Keats wrote an immortal sonnet about it. Chapman collaborated with Jonson and Marston in writing *Eastward Ho!*, which was intended as a friendly reply to *Westward Ho!* written by Dekker and Webster. The original authors thereupon wrote *Northward Ho!*

Dekker's comedies were delightful, and his *The Shoemaker's Holiday* was revived not long ago at the Old Vic and at the Playhouse. They are excellent for their realism, and especially for the pictures they give us of the low life in London in his day. He joined with Middleton in *The Roaring Girl*, and Middleton alone wrote *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, although most of his work was done in collaboration with Rowley, e.g., *A Fair Quarrel* and *The Spanish Gipsy*, the latter being a tragi-comedy.

Thomas Heywood, who is not to be confused with John Heywood mentioned previously, wrote *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, which was extremely popular, although the subject was pathetic. He found his inspiration in the life of the middle classes, and there are moments when he reaches great heights of poetry and drama, and his characterization is exceptionally fine.

Massinger's fame rests upon his *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *The City Woman*, but among his other plays, *The Bondman*, *The Roman Actor*, and *The Renegado* are noteworthy for their ingenious plots.

Webster, like most Elizabethans, collaborated with other playwrights; but later on he worked alone and produced some tragedies which are full of horror. He was one of the few dramatists of the time who had an insight into character and had the power to create real people and not mere types or dummies. Perhaps his best-known works are *The White Devil* and *The Tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi*.

Ford also wrote tragedies like *The Lover's Melancholy* and *The Broken Heart*, and they have been described as full of "lunatic frenzies." The great period of Elizabethan drama is dying, and

the weaknesses are fully apparent in Ford as in Shirley, who was the author of *The Cardinal* and *The Traitor*—tragedies which end with a general slaughter. Rowley and D'Avenant belonged to the same school of ghastly tragedy with a constant series of thrilling and revolting situations, but with a dialogue that is 'flat' and characters which are nothing more than stock figures.

It is a rather pitiful anticlimax to a magnificent age.

CHAPTER VIII

PURITANS: ANCIENT AND MODERN

THE drama has always had enemies in England, and when one remembers that acting is an almost universal instinct, appealing to all ages and all classes of society, the opposition of the Puritans may seem a little odd. Furthermore, when one recalls that practically all drama had a religious origin, and that the Puritans were exceedingly religious, their hostility may appear even more strange.

There is something to be said on both sides, however, and it is our duty to investigate the motives that inspired the good men who denounced the theatre. It is true that the first plays were Bible stories acted by priests and choristers in church; but there is an enormous difference between the simple story of Scripture and the 'embroidered' version produced by the trade-guilds. Perhaps the best illustration of the change may be found by reading a fairy-story like *Babes in the Wood* or *Ali Baba* and then going to see a pantomime based upon the same subject.

In the hands of the laity the sacred themes became crude and comic—caricatures, in fact; and devout people felt that such performances were not only irreverent, but actually evil in their influence. The players were decent citizens, no doubt, but they were inclined to look upon the miracle play as an opportunity for burlesque and buffoonery—a chance to please the mob. But when, in the process of time, professional actors arrived with their farces and interludes the breach between religion and drama grew rapidly wider. These professionals had formed themselves into strolling companies which moved about the country very much as the owners of roundabouts, swing-boats, shooting-galleries, and circuses do at the present day. Their reputation was distinctly bad, and their private lives far from pious. They were constantly in conflict with authority, and gener-

ally managed to make themselves a nuisance wherever they went.

In 1572 a law was passed ordering all such companies (except those who were under the patronage of some noble personage) to disband. They were to be regarded as "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars." The chief result of this enactment was that the majority of these touring companies obtained the favour of some lord and wore his livery, but otherwise they were as free as ever.

The first public theatre was opened in 1576 in Shoreditch, outside the jurisdiction of the civic authorities, and James Burbage was the first actor-manager. It was called *The Theatre*, and was violently attacked by a famous Puritan preacher in 1578. Then Philip Henslowe, a pawnbroker, opened the *Rose Theatre* in Bankside—near Southwark Cathedral—which was then the centre of amusements like bull-fighting and bear-baiting. Burbage followed this example, and built the *Globe Theatre* close by. It was a notorious district, so that the drama, flourishing in such a neighbourhood, naturally became associated with the worst vices of the time.

The Puritans closed the theatres in 1642, and they remained closed until the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. This action of the Puritans has frequently been lamented as a piece of insufferable tyranny, but its effects were not wholly injurious.

In the first place, as all students agree, the drama had been going steadily from bad to worse, and it is quite possible that the Puritan suppression saved it from petering out of its own accord. In the second place, it encouraged the reading of drama, and this stimulated the printing of plays, many of which would otherwise have been lost.

The Elizabethan play had to make its appeal to all classes, but with the coming of the Puritans the middle classes refrained from going to the theatre. Indeed, after the Restoration there were only two theatres in London until 1682, and when these amalgamated there was only one. The audiences consisted of the Royalists (courtiers, beaux, ladies, etc.) and the 'riff-raff' of the

town. The playwrights had to produce a new type of play to satisfy the new type of audience, and all that need be said about the drama of the time is that if it were revived to-day it would raise a storm of denunciation both from the pulpit and the Press. The themes were unsavoury, the jokes were coarse, the language was shocking, the performers had evil reputations, and the members of the audience were not fit company for decent men and women! At least, that is how the Puritans regarded the stage and its works.

After all, the theatre invariably tends to provide the fare which the public appreciates, and if drama degenerated in the Puritan times one must blame Puritanism for staying away. It is another example of the 'vicious circle.' Respectable people decline to go to the theatre because the plays are improper, and plays are improper because only improper people go to see them! By flocking to see the plays they like, and staying away from plays they don't like, the general public practically decides the type of drama which holds the stage. The Restoration play was determined by the Restoration audience. Later on, when the Georges were on the throne, there was a different kind of audience and therefore a different kind of play.

Nowadays we congratulate ourselves that we are less narrow-minded than our grandparents, and the plays of the seventeenth century do not scandalize us so terribly. The coarse language of those days we accept as part of the local colour of the age, and many people prefer it to the refinements and euphemisms of the nineteenth century. The themes are no longer regarded with horror: they deal with subjects that are part of human life and are therefore legitimate material for drama.

Puritanism, at any rate, is understandable, and in a modified form it exists to-day. There are still people who are instinctively suspicious of all amusements; and in country districts especially one frequently meets men and women who believe that card-playing, dancing, theatre-going, and many other popular pastimes are always dangerous and often wrong. The theatre

is still suffering from its old reputation. Actors and actresses are regarded as (shall we say?) hardly nice to know. To anyone who has had the privilege of knowing the Profession, and of realizing the immense amount of hard work that is necessary to win success, this suspicion appears not only unjust, but extremely ridiculous.

The critic who denounces a play because there is a bedroom scene in the second act must bear in mind that the public is responsible for the nature of popular plays. Moreover, there are policemen, Watch Committees, and a very active Censor to prevent plays from being immodest. The person who is liable to be led astray through the modern play or the modern film must surely be feeble-minded.

The exasperating part of the Censorship business is that many fine and serious plays have been forbidden, while other plays which treat the same subject as a matter for jokes and winks have been allowed to pass.

During the nineteenth century, undoubtedly, English people were exceptionally prudish. They developed a perfectly unnatural shame about the human body, and the other countries of Europe could only explain it by concluding that our ancestors were hypocrites. English people disliked nude statues and paintings, and the bathing dresses of English women were provided with skirts which reached to their toes. Only a few years ago there was a great outcry against short skirts and silk stockings, but at last we have come to realize how stupid we were. One of the main objections to the stage of fifty years ago was that the members of the chorus displayed their legs in dancing!

The English attitude towards life has changed completely in a generation, and the people who still feel that the theatre is a wicked place are rather like Rip Van Winkles who have been asleep for a long, long time. Their motives are quite sincere, and one must give them credit for meaning well; but their ideas have not moved with the times. They are too fearful of the perils that surround them.

When Shakespeare wrote

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!

the schoolmaster was very worried about the possible effects of such a line upon his scholars. He persuaded the publisher to omit the worst bits, and the word 'damn' was printed 'd——' and pronounced "dash." Barry Pain had an amusing story about a man's attempts to read Shakespeare to his wife, but when he began (from *Macbeth*) with "Scene I, A blasted heath," the wife was shocked immediately. "There's no need to swear about it!" she declared.

When Bernard Shaw introduced the word 'bloody' into a play (*Pygmalion*) people wrote indignant letters to the daily papers about the corruption of the English stage; but in a war-play like *Journey's End*, where the soldiers make use of the same adjective, as they habitually did in the trenches, nobody ventured to protest. We now realize that swearing is part of the jargon used by the fighting forces. Similarly the Censor permitted the racy dialogue of Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie*, because it was inevitable in the portrayal of sailors, but he declines to allow such freedom to the playwright who is merely trying to make a sensation.

CHAPTER IX

RESTORATION DRAMA

THERE were two theatres in London during the reign of Charles II, whereas there had been at least half a dozen in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Sir William D'Avenant ran the Duke of York's Company in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Thomas Killigrew had a rival company called the King's Servants in Drury Lane. These two companies united in 1682.

The drama of the period may be classified into four groups—viz., heroic tragedy, the comedy of manners, opera, and farce. The first two are the most important for our consideration.

Heroic tragedy, an imitation of the style popular in France, was written in rhymed couplets. The most famous playwrights were Dryden, Orrery, Lee, and Otway: and their themes (love and honour) had a strong appeal to the aristocrats who composed the audience. In every play there is a wonderful hero of almost superhuman courage and prowess, a heroine who is as constant as she is beautiful, and there is inevitably a vast amount of fighting. The dialogue is rhetorical to the point of bombast, and the 'idealism' is exalted to a pitch that is sometimes more than a trifle absurd.

Dryden had a rather exciting life. His relatives were strict Puritans, of course, but when Charles II came to the throne they lost their influential positions, and the young poet immediately became an ardent Royalist. Later on, in the time of James II, he became a Catholic, and wrote a fine poem, *The Hind and the Panther*, in defence of his new faith.

Dryden's ambitions carried him into many fields. His prose is as brilliant as his verse; he wrote comedies and tragedies as well as heroic dramas; he translated Virgil, parts of Homer, and modernized some of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. He was made Poet

Laureate and awarded a substantial pension, which ceased with the Revolution of 1688. He wrote *Absalom and Achitophel*, one of the most pungent satires that we have, in highly polished verse, and his ode entitled *Alexander's Feast* is about as perfect as the genius of man can achieve.

His plays include *The Indian Emperour*, *Tyrannik Love*, *The Conquest of Granada*, and *All for Love*, which are heroic tragedies, and *The Wild Gallant*, *An Evening's Love*, and *Marriage à la Mode*, which are comedies. Dryden entered into a contract to produce at least three plays a year, but failed to carry it out. Probably his worst disappointment came when his detested rival Shadwell, whom he attacked so savagely in satiric verse, was made Poet Laureate in his place.

The Duke of Buckingham's burlesque, *The Rehearsal*, poked merciless fun at the heroic tragedy of the day, and it has been described as the greatest skit in the English language.

The Earl of Orrery wrote *The Black Prince*, *The Tragedy of Mustapha*, *Tryphon*, and *The History of Henry V.* He was profoundly influenced by French drama, and his style is more restrained than that of his fellows; but he is to be praised for seeking themes from his native land.

Nathaniel Lee wrote *The Tragedy of Nero*, *Sophonisba*, *Gloriana*, *Theodosius*, and other plays which are clearly derived from classical inspiration. The unfortunate author went mad, but in his luminous intervals he produced work which reaches a very high level of accomplishment.

Thomas Otway wrote *Don Carlos*, *The Orphan*, and *Venice Preserv'd*, all of which have great themes and are intensely moving. In all probability Dryden's *All for Love* (a version of the familiar Antony and Cleopatra story) and Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* are the two finest plays in this class of drama.

There were other writers of heroic tragedy at this time, but except to students of the history of drama they are of no importance to-day.

By far the best work of the Restoration period was done by

the writers of comedy, and when one realizes the excellence of Congreve and Wycherley the heroic-tragedians (including Otway and Dryden) appear to be of little or no account.

The comedy of manners, as it is called, is associated with the names of Shadwell, Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, and their work, taken *en bloc*, is one of the glories of English drama.

Owing to the satires by Dryden, it has become the fashion to deride Thomas Shadwell, but if he was not great as a poet he certainly did some extremely good work for the theatre. He is thoroughly representative of his time, and Professor Saintsbury bestowed upon him the title of the father of the comedy of manners. He wrote nearly a score of plays of various kinds, including tragedy and opera, but his best work was done in the comic vein popularized by Ben Jonson. His chief plays are *The Sullen Lovers*, *The Humourists*, *Epsom Wells*, *The Virtuoso*, and *Bury Fair*.

Sir George Etherege was a courtier, and, like all the dramatists who gave us the comedy of manners, he depicts in his plays the life of aristocratic Society. They appeal to the mind rather than to the emotions, and their main characters are the wits, fops, and ladies who appear to have spent their lives in intrigue and pleasure-seeking. The dialogue is witty and clever, but, judged by the standards of the twentieth century, somewhat coarse and often vulgar. Etherege's best plays were *She Would if She Could* and *The Man of Mode*.

In his earlier plays, *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-master*, William Wycherley had not yet found his form; but in *The Plain Dealer* (in which the influence of Molière is perceptible) and *The Country Wife* he surpassed Etherege and Shadwell and wrote with a satirical power which is worthy of comparison with that of Ben Jonson. Like Congreve, he treats human wickedness as an occasion for wit and laughter. His characters are not to be judged by the moral standards of daily life: they are neither moral nor immoral, but gloriously non-moral beings living in a Utopia

of gallantry, where, to quote Lamb, "pleasure is duty and the manners perfect freedom."

It is difficult to praise William Congreve too extravagantly. In his lecture on Congreve Thackeray observed:

Having got his education in Ireland, at the same school and college with Swift, he came to live in the Middle Temple, London, where he luckily bestowed no attention to the law; but splendidly frequented the coffee-houses and theatres, and appeared in a side-box, the tavern, the Piazza, and the Mall, brilliant, beautiful, and victorious from the first. Everybody acknowledged the young chieftain. The great Mr Dryden declared that he was equal to Shakespeare. . . . Pope dedicated his *Iliad* to him; Swift, Addison, Steele, all acknowledge Congreve's rank, and lavish compliments upon him. Voltaire went to wait upon him as one of the Representatives of Literature. . . .

And Hazlitt's tribute is memorable: "The style of Congreve is inimitable, nay, perfect. It is the highest model of comic dialogue." Congreve and his fellow-authors can be criticized only on the score of morals. The characters in the comedy of manners are witty, merry, carefree, happy-go-lucky, and therefore dangerous. They are, judged by our standards, wicked and worldly minded, and, as Lamb suggests in his essay *On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century*, we are afraid for our safety. "In our anxiety that our morality should not take cold, we wrap it up in a great blanket surtout of precaution against the breeze and sunshine."

A little later the essayist confesses:

I do not know how it is with others, but I feel the better always for the perusal of one of Congreve's—nay, why should I not add even of Wycherley's—comedies. I am the gayer at least for it; and I could never connect those sports of a witty fancy in any shape with any result to be drawn from them to imitation in real life. They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairyland.

Congreve's first play, *The Old Bachelor*, was written to amuse himself, and was performed when the author was twenty-three, and *The Mourning Bride* came four years later. The best of his

work—*The Double Dealer*, *Love for Love*, and *The Way of the World*—are absolute masterpieces within the limits of the artificial comedy of the time.

George Farquhar's comedies include *Love and a Bottle*, *The Constant Couple*, *The Inconstant*, and *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Sir John Vanbrugh gave us *The Relapse*, *The Mistake*, *The False Friend*, *Squire Trelooby*, and *The Country House*. In the work of both men one can perceive the tendency to break away from the school of Wycherley and Congreve. Farquhar apparently grew tired of the brilliant artificiality of the life depicted in the comedy of manners, and his later plays reveal moods of criticism and satire. Vanbrugh, who was more robust by nature, broke away in the direction of farce, and relied for his fun upon action and complicated situation rather than upon witty dialogue.

These dramatists bring us to the end of the seventeenth century. It was a remarkably interesting period, with many ups and downs for the theatre (including its total suppression for eighteen years), and, although one only occasionally has a chance to see the plays on the modern stage, the revivals invariably attract a crowd of people, not only those who are interested in the evolution of British drama, but those who appreciate the plays for their own sakes.

The century began with Shakespeare in his prime, and a host of other playwrights producing new plays every month; it passed under a cloud of disapprobation when the Puritan forces gained the upper hand, it revived when the kingship was restored, and it gave the world the comedy of manners, with its superb creation of comic character. Millamant, Lady Wishfort, Mirabell, Pinchbeck, and Margery from Congreve's *The Way of the World*, Lord Foppington from Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*, and Archer and Mrs Sullen from Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* are undoubtedly among the great figures of English Comedy.

The modern playgoer has not been slow to seize opportunities of seeing Restoration drama in revivals during recent years. Congreve was given first place with *The Way of the World*, which

Sir Nigel Playfair produced at Hammersmith and in which Miss Edith Evans as Millamant gave an elating and triumphant performance. His *Love for Love* was revived by the company from the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells, and subsequently in an ornate Gielgud production, a West End box-office success of 1943, which seemed to hang a portrait gallery of old comedy characters, and, a little, to leave them hanging in the air.

Other Restoration revivals have been Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*, *The Constant Couple*, and *The Recruiting Officer*, and Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (with an American wife). In the last-mentioned the late George Grossmith scored a hit in the part of Horner.

But the most significant change in the seventeenth century was in the attitude of the audience. In the early part of the century drama was a popular pastime and appealed to all classes of society; at the end of the century it was a pleasure for a few—the upper classes chiefly—and the remainder of our fellow-countrymen had come to regard the theatre as the centre of evil influence. It was constantly being denounced by the Puritan preachers, and the respectable people, including the vast middle classes, gave the theatre a wide berth.

The tendency to regard art as the concern of a few special people is always deplorable. Art should be democratic, and its appeal should be to everybody. It is, or should be, a common human instinct to enjoy music and painting. The working classes should sing and dance and enjoy the theatre as much as the middle or upper classes. Drama deals with the fundamental facts of life—love and hate, men and women, youth and age, good and evil, laughter and tears, sorrow and tragedy. It is in human nature to love children, to be intrigued by a love-story, to be excited about a wedding, to be moved by death, to be indignant about injustice, to be thrilled by heroism, to be interested in ideas that wage war upon one another. The whole of life is the legitimate field for drama, and this truth has never been more completely realized than at the present day.

CHAPTER X

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE story of English drama during the eighteenth century can be briefly told. The comedy of manners was popular at the beginning, but, partly owing to the increasing size of the theatres and partly to the changes in public taste, this type of play ceased to appeal. There was a tendency to produce plays of a sentimental nature, with plenty of moralizing speeches, and accompanied by exhibitions of maudlin pathos. Heroic plays, with unlimited opportunities for bombastic speech, naturally suited the big theatre, and the dramas of Dryden were frequently produced.

Another tendency of the eighteenth century was in the direction of classical plays based upon the theories of Aristotle and the models of Greece and Rome. They aimed at the French ideal of rigid 'form' and neatness of construction, but they were apt to be too cold and restrained. It so often happens that when a dramatist creates live characters they smash up the beautifully designed little plot in which he intended to keep them. The only alternative seems to be to use 'tailor-made' characters who always behave perfectly and do exactly what they are told to do. The playwright who is a tyrant to his own 'children' and keeps them under the strictest discipline—to serve his own purposes—need not be astonished when he is told that those 'children' are uninteresting and devoid of personality.

The idea of using characters merely to carry out a given plot is almost as indefensible as that of Vincent Crummies, who bought the scenery first and ordered a play in which he could make use of it.

A typical example of the classical play may be found in *Irene*, by the famous Dr Johnson. *Irene* was produced quite successfully, but the success must be attributed to the histrionic power of

David Garrick rather than to the author. James Thomson, the poet who wrote *The Seasons*, also gave the world a number of plays, but, as their titles show, they were imitations of the classical. His chief works were *Sophonisba*, *Agamemnon*, and *Coriolanus*.

Addison, Steele, and Pope were active at this time, and they all tried their hands at writing plays. Addison's *Cato* was probably the best, and it differed from the majority of the plays of the period in giving the love-element a secondary place in the drama. Steele, who, like Addison, was a delightful essayist, wrote *The Funeral*, *The Lying Lover*, *The Tender Husband*, and *The Conscious Lovers*. These, though they are excessively moral, are all comedies, but they have no interest for theatregoers at the present day.

The melodramas of the eighteenth century were innumerable, and many of them dreadful. The characterization was so crude, the language so bombastic, and the thrilling situations so extraordinary that we should probably laugh where the playwright intended us to weep or to hold our breath. But in an age when the very comedies are tearful what can one expect?

In the previous century Otway helped to inspire the 'Mock Turtle' school of tearfulness, and, although he did some fine work, his followers were more to be pitied than admired. Rowe was the best of them, and he turned to historical subjects—e.g., *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Grey*, and *Tamerlane*. At this period the historical plays of Shakespeare found favour once more.

Ballad-opera was popular at this time too, for the big theatres were eminently suitable for music and choruses. The most famous example was Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, which was immensely popular, but *Polly*, its sequel, was forbidden, and was not performed until nearly forty years later. The reason for the banning of *Polly* was not its morals or the lack of them. After all, as most of us who have seen the revival of *The Beggar's Opera* know, the morals of these operas were not exactly exalted. There

were in *Polly*, however, fairly strong traces of revolutionary ardour, and as the influence was ascribed to Rousseau, whose ideas did so much to inflame the passion which led to the French Revolution, the play was regarded as dangerous.

If the Censor had banned Galsworthy's *The Silver Box* on the grounds that it taught that there was "one law for the rich and another for the poor," or Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* because it portrays Society turned topsy-turvy, one would be in a position to grasp the workings of the official mind. The notion of suppressing dangerous doctrines does not strike us as sound policy to-day. The expression of a grievance often acts as a safety-valve—except, of course, during a war, when criticism of the Government must be silenced at all costs.

Another great writer of the eighteenth century was Henry Fielding, the author of *Tom Jones*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *Amelia*. He had a great wit and a keen sense of the ridiculous, but his dramas were carelessly constructed. His best work was a burlesque entitled *The Tragedy of Tragedies; or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. Burlesques like *Tom Thumb*, Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, or Sheridan's *The Critic* are always worth studying, because they invariably call attention to the foibles of the time.

In a volume of *Eighteenth-century Plays*, edited by John Hampden for Everyman's Library, the reader will find representative plays by Addison, Rowe, Gay, Fielding, Lillo, George Colman, David Garrick, and Richard Cumberland. Mr Hampden writes:

Despite its obvious faults the student will find that the eighteenth century was not merely one of degeneration and decay. It clung desperately to worn-out formulas, Jonsonian 'humours,' pseudo-classical 'laws,' theatrical intrigues, grotesquely happy endings, and a clutter of stage-tricks. It carried sentimental didacticism to nauseous extremes, and spent itself in the inanities of the 'burletta' and 'after-piece.' Shakespeare was accepted in strange perversions. Intervals between the acts of tragedies came to be decorated with hornpipes and harlequinades. . . . But this is not all. Innovations were made

and experiments attempted; forces were set to work which had great influence upon modern European drama and prepared the way for the renaissance that began about fifty years ago.

It has been a literary fashion to jeer softly at the drama of the eighteenth century, and undoubtedly the bulk of it was pretty bad; but we must never allow ourselves to forget that it was the age of Garrick and Mrs Siddons, that it gave us Sheridan and Goldsmith. Shortly after the last war there was a revival of interest in the eighteenth century, and one can only explain it by saying that the mental attitude of the time had much in common with that of two centuries ago. The appeal of *The Beggar's Opera* to the twentieth-century audience astonished everybody, and Sir Nigel Playfair followed up his successful hit by reviving *Polly*, *Lionel and Clarissa*, *The Duenna*, and *The London Merchant*.

Before passing on to Goldsmith and Sheridan we must not overlook the work of Samuel Foote, a brilliant actor as well as a dramatist, who scandalized and titillated the theatre by his series of satirical comedies. The most famous were *The Devil upon Two Sticks*, *The Nabob*, and *The Minor*. Samuel Foote performing at the Haymarket Theatre in his own plays was one of the institutions of the eighteenth century.

The two outstanding dramatists of the century were Irishmen, and they are famous because they led a revolt against sentimentality.

Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* is known to everybody because it is still a great favourite, especially with amateurs. There is great fun in the story, bright wit in the dialogue, and such a healthy spirit pervading the comedy that, in spite of the quaintness of the speeches, we can always have a good laugh over it. What we may fail to realize is that the absence of mawkish sentiment and the introduction of low-life characters struck a new note when the play was first produced. Tony Lumpkin and his 'pals' at the local public-house remind us of the drinking scenes in *Twelfth Night*. The central idea—the mistaking of a private house for an inn—is supposed to have originated in an incident

that actually occurred to the author when he was travelling in Ireland.

The Good-natured Man is a much inferior play, but it reveals the same dislike of sentimentalism which is the keynote of his work. Apart from his dramatic writing, of course, Goldsmith won great fame as a poet and essayist, and his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* is one of the classics. He was also one of the illustrious company that gathered round Dr Samuel Johnson—probably the most remarkable assemblage of brilliant men that ever met together in a club. It included a great painter (Sir Joshua Reynolds), a great actor (David Garrick), a fine poet and essayist (Oliver Goldsmith), a great biographer (Boswell), and a great orator and statesman (Edmund Burke), as well as the great Johnson himself as the autocrat of the party.

The name of Richard Brinsley Sheridan is one of the most outstanding in the eighteenth century. His father, an actor-manager and a teacher of elocution, was for a time a friend of Dr Johnson; his mother was a playwright and novelist. Like Goldsmith, he was born in Ireland (in 1751), but as his father was in Garrick's company at Covent Garden and later on at Bath, the boy was educated at Harrow.

When he was about twenty he fell in love with Elizabeth Linley, and he fought two duels with a rival suitor before, at the age of twenty-two, he married her. Sheridan had little money, but he refused to allow his young wife to sing in public, and took to writing plays. *The Rivals*, which is still intensely popular, was produced when the dramatist was barely twenty-four. In the same year he produced a farce called *St Patrick's Day*, which is unworthy of him, and a comic opera, *The Duenna*, which was a great success. It was revived some years ago at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

Sheridan succeeded Garrick as manager of Drury Lane Theatre when he was twenty-five, and in 1777 he gave the world his masterpiece, *The School for Scandal*, which is a brilliantly satirical comedy of manners. It was inspired by the slanders which

embittered his life, particularly in the fashionable town of Bath, and he satirized "the sham chivalry and sham romance of which he made such immortal fun."

Everybody should know *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic*, which is an amusing burlesque.

In all Sheridan's comedies there is a complicated plot. One person is constantly being mistaken for another, and the intrigues become steadily more and more entangled. The dialogue is full of sparkling epigrammatic wit, and the characters are grouped with the skill of a master. The longing of Lydia Languish for romance and the ridiculous moodiness of Faulkland are probably intended to satirize the sentimentalism of contemporary drama.

The praise accorded to Sheridan's comedies is universal, and perhaps the only criticism that has been levelled at them is the suggestion that the characters are types—like the humours of Ben Jonson, or the virtues and vices of the old morality play. His habit of naming his people by their salient qualities tends to confirm this idea. One expects Sir Anthony Absolute to be certain that he is always right, and Sir Lucius O'Trigger to crave for duels, just as one expects Lady Teazle to be exasperating and Sir Benjamin Backbite to make a hobby of talking scandal. Nevertheless, the characters are sufficiently alive to become instantly recognizable when, as sometimes happens, they leave their eighteenth-century setting and stroll into a modern drawing-room.

Sheridan's career as a dramatist came to an end when he was twenty-eight. He entered Parliament at twenty-nine, and quickly took a leading place among the orators of the day. His speech at the impeachment of Warren Hastings lasted over five hours and caused a nine days' wonder in the country. He was a personal friend of the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV) and of Charles James Fox.

His later days were unhappy. His reckless living undermined his health, and his political party went to pieces. Not only was he overwhelmed with grief at the death of his wife and of his friend

Fox, but his income from Drury Lane ceased when the theatre was burnt in 1809. He then lost his seat in Parliament and was thrown into prison for debt. He died in 1816, and was given a magnificent funeral in Westminster Abbey.

There is one other play which might be mentioned before we pass on to a consideration of the nineteenth century—viz., *The London Merchant*, by George Lillo. It may be described as a domestic tragedy, and several years ago when it was revived at Hammersmith in *When Crummles Played* it provoked the audience to uproarious laughter. The plot is feeble and far-fetched, the dialogue is artificial, and the characters are lifeless; but the play deserves credit because it broke away from the popular notion that tragedy was reserved only for the great. In this case the hero was an apprentice.

Still, Lillo could not claim to be the originator of the domestic tragedy. *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, published in 1608, deals with a tragic theme in the lives of people of humble birth, but in reviving the idea Lillo ran counter to the conventions of his day.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

IF, from the point of view of the theatre, the eighteenth century was disappointing the beginning of the nineteenth century was much worse. The huge buildings were not adapted for good drama, and the audiences were apparently quite satisfied with the spectacular and melodramatic fare which was provided. The more intelligent and respectable people preferred to stay at home.

The classical play, inspired largely by France, was dying painlessly, and for a time there was a movement towards the romantic play. The former, based upon abstract principles and governed by rigid rules, did not appeal to the adventurous spirit of the age. The French and American Revolutions were accompanied by an impatience of restrictions and a craving for wider freedom. The idea of an inevitable fate controlling the lives of men was the underlying *motif* of all classic drama from Sophocles and Euripides to Racine and Corneille: but the ultimate idea behind the romantic drama was that of the power of the human will to influence human destiny.

The romantic drama of Shakespeare and of the Spanish writers like Lope de Vega and Calderon tended to break away from the abstract rules, to mix comedy and tragedy, to sacrifice the unities, and to indulge in unexpected outbursts of song. There was a great vogue for the romantic play in Germany—Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller being the leaders of the rebel party—and even in France itself there was a new romantic movement, started by Victor Hugo and the elder Dumas, which tried to bring the theatre into closer grips with the life of the time.

England was less responsive to innovation than Germany and France. Comedy was feeble and degenerated into broad farce or musical comedy, but one vigorous comic piece should be recalled

if only because its form was an anticipation of the modern revue—Pierce Egan's *Tom and Jerry*, which was immensely popular in the eighteen-twenties and is amusing to read to-day as illustrating the lives of the 'Corinthians.'

Tragedy lacked subtlety and changed its nature to melodrama. The most distinguished names at this period were those of James Sheridan Knowles and Lord Lytton. The latter, who was more famous as a novelist, wrote some fine novels like *Pelham* and some poor ones like *The Last Days of Pompeii*; but as a dramatist he is chiefly remembered for *The Lady of Lyons*.

There was a revolt against melodrama a little later: it was too serious, too tearful, and lent itself too readily to burlesque. The French dramatist Scribe saw that the audience needed light fare and amusement, and in his five hundred plays he frankly catered for the popular taste. His ideal was a well-made play, expert in its craftsmanship, and handled with the lightest touch. He took the greatest care to avoid treating controversial subjects seriously, and he has been described as a magnificent showman of the theatre.

Another prolific French dramatist of the early nineteenth century was Sardou, who, like Scribe, was an expert craftsman, and the pair of them gained an international reputation, and were imitated in most of the countries of Europe. The theatre was treated as a place for popular entertainment, and the note of solemnity was avoided at all costs.

There was presently a revolt against the Scribe and Sardou school of drama. Playwrights admired the neat construction of the French play, but they accused it of frivolity and a total lack of social conscience. Thence came the 'play of ideas'—the drama which deals with the problems of the age. It was morally in earnest, and was written with a purpose—to redress a social injustice or to advocate some urgent reform. The younger Dumas was the Radical and Augier the Conservative in the propagandist play in France.

A parallel movement occurred in Germany. Romanticism

died in that country about 1830, and Heine, Gutzkow, and Laube initiated the new drama of ideas.

Propagandist drama is rarely good art. The ridiculing of human folly is as old as the Greeks and appears in all comedy, but comedy is a far greater thing than a play written expressly to censure or scold the audience. Still, one must say a kind word for the 'play of ideas,' since it reconciled serious-minded people to the theatre and aimed at something more than mere amusement. It prepared the way for the psychological drama, and in the German playwright Hebbel one makes the acquaintance of the forerunner of Ibsen. Both Ludwig and Hebbel based their plays upon the conflict of the individual with his environment. They did not, like Dumas the younger, deal with doctrines or opinions, but with obsessions, deep-rooted passions, and the monomanias that drive human beings beyond their judgment.

Drama on the Continent was very much alive in the nineteenth century, but in England, owing to the aforementioned prejudices of the early Victorian and the peculiar nature of our theatrical architecture, the dramatist met with little or no encouragement. The English theatre was at its lowest ebb. It is not fair to assume that the country was lacking in genius. The nineteenth century was famous for its poets, and many of them wrote poetic dramas; but the theatre-going people were not book-lovers and few of these literary plays were produced.

To name but a few: Coleridge wrote *Remorse*, Southey wrote *Wat Tyler* and *The Fall of Robespierre*, Wordsworth wrote *The Borderers*, Scott wrote *The House of Aspen*, and Shelley wrote *The Cenci* (performed publicly for the first time in 1922) and *Prometheus Unbound*. Even Keats tried his hand at a play in *Otho the Great*. Charles Lamb wrote *John Woodvil*, an imitation of Elizabethan tragedy, which was never produced; but his little farce, *Mr. H.*, was produced and called forth a storm of hisses in which the author joined as heartily as anybody. Tennyson gave the world *Queen Mary*, *Harold*, and *Becket*. The last was produced by Irving, but, in spite of the popularity of Tennyson as a poet and

of Irving as an actor-producer, the play was not a success. There have been attempts to revive *Harold*, but no one pretends that the play is a successful drama.

The two poets of the nineteenth century who had the innate gift of drama were Lord Byron and Robert Browning. Byron wrote *Manfred*, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Cain*, the last being an experiment in reviving the mystery play. Browning wrote *King Victor and King Charles*, *The Return of the Druses*, *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, *Colombe's Birthday*, *Luria*, *A Soul's Tragedy* (which begins in verse and ends in prose), and *Pippa Passes*. Several of these plays were not intended to be performed on the stage, and all of them are better read than acted.

It is a matter for regret that these poets were not encouraged to write for the theatre. Had there been smaller theatres, better actors, and intelligent audiences they might have visited the theatre more frequently and discovered a little of the technical requirements of the stage.

The drama began to revive about the time of the appearance of Dion Boucicault, whose best-known works are, *The Broken Vow*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *Paul Lafarge*, and some Irish plays, like *The Colleen Bawn*, *The Wicklow Wedding*, and *The O'Dowd*. Boucicault's plays relied upon stage-carpentry and scenic effect, but they would not satisfy any but an extremely simple audience at the present day.

The name that stands out like a landmark in the history of British drama is that of Thomas Robertson. His first important comedy appeared in 1865, and the author died in 1871, at the age of forty-one. But he had given the world *Society*, *Ours*, *Caste*, *School*, *War*, and, what is of inestimable importance, a new sort of drama. Robertson found a theatre that was full of artifice and artificiality: the dialogue was utterly unlike the conversation of daily life; the characters displayed emotions that were as unnatural as their make-up; they did not even think as human beings think; they had no existence apart from the stage. English drama was suffocated by theatricality.

It is easy to smile in a superior way at plays like *Caste*, but one has to give Robertson the credit for bringing life on to the English stage. Many of our dramatic critics are apt to declare that the revival of the drama was due to Ibsen, but Robertson's plays appeared before Ibsen was known in this country.

Ibsen was a great genius, a pioneer who gave the theatre a new outlook and a fresh technique; but if he had never existed our drama would eventually have saved itself. Robertson, in spite of the obvious weaknesses which belonged to the period in which he lived, did succeed in bringing real people into his plays, and their problems were the problems of life outside the theatre.

We have to remember too that Robertson was living in an atmosphere of Victorianism which we moderns have come to despise for its insincerity, hypocrisy, and worship of 'good taste.' It was 'bad form' to discuss religion, and scepticism was worse than wickedness—it showed lack of good breeding! The orthodox Victorians accepted religion, morals, and human love as subjects about which no nice person ever dared to speculate. One did not talk about these things, one did not think about them; they were to be accepted 'ready made,' and the demands made by 'good form' compelled many people (especially those who could not prevent themselves from thinking) to become either social heretics and therefore liable to persecution, or—hypocrites.

Such a state of things could not last. Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and there sprang up a school of scientists (Huxley, Spencer, Tyndall, and others) who attacked the orthodox theology of the times. These men believed that the human race descended from animals, and that the streak of animal nature still runs through civilized man. There followed a fiery discussion of morals and social conventions, and many things which had hitherto been wrapped in mystery and sacred silence were discussed with a frankness that shocked the world. The subject of love, which had been for centuries a leading theme in nearly every drama, was dragged into daylight.

Before this the real meaning of marriage had been known to practically all adults, but they had refused to talk about it. Love was always treated as a romantic emotion, and it was never hinted in plays or novels that it was part of Nature's plan to continue the race. There was a vague idea too that marriages were "made in heaven," and it was not admitted that hundreds of men and women make bad mistakes, that they are liable to be misled by a temporary passion in youth, that they occasionally break their vows and elope with some one else.

All this appears to be a digression, but it is not altogether a side-track in the discussion of the drama of the nineteenth century. The modern novel discusses everything that belongs to human life, and the modern drama goes as far as the Censor will permit. Drama cannot be alive and significant unless it is in intimate touch with reality, and reality was what Tom Robertson and his followers went 'all out' to achieve.

Mr H. F. Rubinstein compares the change introduced by Robertson to a train emerging from a tunnel into daylight.

He says:

There is an irresistible charm about his plays. Every now and then they lapse into lifelessness. We become conscious of a first-class compartment that jolts a little dangerously in the morning twilight . . . and the effort of keeping natural after such ages and ages of that horrid tunnel, with the fumes still about the throat. . . . Till presently they open their eyes, the breath returns, and we have another joyous little prattle over the cups and saucers. . . . The cause was winning all along the line. What cause? it may be asked. Propriety *cum* Romance in the middle of the reign of Queen Victoria: Coals in Newcastle! The cause was Naturalism in the Theatre, and it was a hard-won victory of the first round. Both the Romance and the Propriety were to go by the board before the final victory.

We are now approaching modern times. Sir Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones carried on the good work, and were both fiercely attacked. Sir Arthur Pinero's plays number over forty, varying from a jolly farce like *Dandy Dick* or a

fantasy like *Sweet Lavender* to the most serious dramas dealing with the clamorous problems of the day.

Henry Arthur Jones was at once a rival and a fellow-worker, but he managed to shock the public by going a little farther than Pinero. He had a whole-souled hatred of hypocrisy, and wrote a play entitled *The Hypocrites*. His most famous plays include *Saints and Sinners*, *Judah*, *The Crusaders*, and *Michael and his Lost Angel*. The last caused an uproar, because the main theme concerns a clergyman who sinned and was not as penitent as he ought to have been. "Hands off religion!" was the cry, and it was echoed all over the country; but two men defended the play, and their names are worth noting, although they had not yet won the reputation that came later. They were William Archer and George Bernard Shaw.

Jones preached for the new theatre, but his preaching plays should not make us forget that he did work of a different kind. In the early part of his career he wrote melodramas like *The Middleman* and *The Silver King* which were remarkable successes, and towards the end he reverted to comedy and gave us *The Liars* and *Mrs Dane's Defence*.

Two other great names of the nineteenth century are those of Oscar Wilde and W. S. Gilbert. Wilde belonged to a company of æsthetes who worshipped beauty with a reverence that was almost religious. He admired the exquisite, whether it was in the form of a drawing, a passage of prose or verse, a lovely frock, a piece of porcelain, carved ivory, or jewellery. He hated the Victorians for their vulgarity, their smugness, their self-righteousness, their sentimentality.

His plays are comedies—*Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *An Ideal Husband*—and they are distinguished for their sparkling and epigrammatic wit. Wilde was the first dramatist to carry the modern English play to an honoured place on the world stage. He wrote in French as well as in English, and had a natural affinity with the French temperament. One perceives the in-

fluence of Scribe in his neat construction and craftsmanship as well as in his gaiety and raillery; but the spirit of his comedies irresistibly reminds us of the Restoration comedies of Congreve and Wycherley.

Wilde was not a representative Englishman, and he joined in the great game of 'guying' Victorian respectability. His sarcasms are most stinging when they are accompanied by an artless smile. Broadly speaking, there are two methods of attacking what we feel to be wrong. We may become violently angry and denounce with all the emphasis at our command, or we may keep our tempers under control and attack by ridicule and ironical laughter. Wilde preferred the second method, and although he is often denounced as dangerous because he undermines the faith in accepted standards of conduct and thought, he was a fine artist and achieved a greater work than is popularly supposed.

There has recently been a revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest* which scored a triumphant success in the West End. It is one of the supreme farces of the world. *An Ideal Husband* was also revived in London in 1943.

Farce depends ultimately upon humour of situation, and one cannot dismiss the nineteenth century without mentioning the consistent popularity of *Charley's Aunt*, by Brandon Thomas. *The Importance of Being Earnest* happens to have the additional merit of brilliant dialogue and a sophistication which is lacking in the more rollicking fun of *Charley's Aunt*.

Gilbert's name is so closely associated with Sullivan's that it is difficult to think of them apart. Their comic operas—*The Mikado*, *The Yeoman of the Guard*, *Iolanthe*, *The Gondoliers*, *Patience*, *Ruddigore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and the rest—delighted the Victorians by their wit and held them by their ideas. The recent revival of Gilbert and Sullivan in London revealed beyond all doubt that the work still appeals, especially to those who are not too young.

Both men, however, had an independent existence, and *The*

Palace of Truth and *Pygmalion and Galatea* may be cited as characteristically whimsical works of a great humorist with a style so personal that the word 'Gilbertian' has taken its place in the language.

Like Wilde himself, whom he satirized in *Patience*, Gilbert had a brilliant wit, and was never so happy as when he was attacking the foibles of the age. He was intensely amusing, and enjoyed paradoxes, verbal jugglery, equivocations, and anomalous situations, but there was satire behind the banter which may, or may not, have been due to an undercurrent of bitterness. In a sense he joined with Wilde in attacking the respectable Englishman and his beliefs, preparing the way for another Irishman whose attacks on hypocrisy and sentimentality, delivered with rapier-like wit, were at once so fascinating and so deadly.

THE INFLUENCE OF IBSEN

THE drama in England, as we have seen, sank to its lowest depths in the nineteenth century. Its sentimental melodrama was utterly remote from life, and the stage was suffocated by false emotion and theatricality. The revolt against unreality was headed by Robertson, and the good work was continued by men like Pinero, Jones, Grundy, and others. At this time, however, there appeared in Norway a certain Henrik Ibsen—a great genius of the theatre, a superman whose influence revolutionized the drama of Christendom. William Archer and Bernard Shaw were among the first to realize the significance of Ibsen's work, the former translating his plays into English, the latter defending him for all he was worth.

The first thing to recognize about Ibsen is that he found the material for dramas in ordinary, everyday life. He was intensely interested in the social problems of the day, and he saw comedy and tragedy in the struggles of individuals in conflict with the forces of conventional life. His drama was primarily domestic and social tragedy.

Moreover, Ibsen's plays dealt with problems that had hitherto been banned from the stage or treated only as a matter of light jesting. He was as fearless as he was serious, and, in a deep sense, he was a writer of religious plays—a new Puritan opposing all the frivolity of the 'Cavalier' dramatists. Shaw has emphasized this aspect of Ibsenism by his own *Plays for Puritans* and *Plays Unpleasant*.

Again, Ibsen attempted to make the people on his stage talk and act with convincing reality. He would have no stage tricks like the soliloquy and the 'aside'—conventions which were defensible in the Elizabethan theatre, where the audience was in close touch with the actors, but which were ridiculous in vast

theatres, where every muttered 'aside' had to be shouted in order to reach the back of the gallery.

Spectacular scenes did not appeal to Ibsen in the least. He had no desire for thrilling action to express emotion; he could secure all his effects by quiet speech. There was no need for miraculous rescues from blazing houses, no need for revolver-shots and general panic. The comedy and tragedy of real life can be revealed without theatricalities. *A Doll's House*, for example, deals with a modern woman who was tired of being treated as an irresponsible child and wanted to live her own life. It was one of the first signs of the great movement for woman's independence which culminated in the agitation for votes and equal rights with men. Nora's revolt against her husband took the form of passionate speech in the home, and when she went away and slammed the door behind her the echoes of that slamming door resounded through half the countries of Europe.

Ibsen was a great innovator, a great pioneer of the new and serious drama. He had disciples in other countries as well as in his own. There was Björnson (in Norway), Chekhov (in Russia), Strindberg (in Sweden), Brieux (in France), Hauptmann and Toller (in Germany), as well as scores of modern dramatists in our own country and in America.

The new technique introduced by Ibsen has been adopted everywhere, and if Robertson's plays (*Caste*, for example) strike us as theatrical to-day it is because we have grown accustomed to the new style of drama which he was the first to introduce.

It is difficult for the modern mind to grasp the difference that Ibsenism made to the theatre. One can only compare it with the influence of Darwinism, which revolutionized the whole of biological science.

Apart from theatrical technique, Ibsen was a pioneer of thought, and ruthlessly tackled problems which had never been seriously investigated. In *Pillars of Society* he examined our ideals and found them rotten; he exposed the hollowness of our

accepted standards and conventions; he dragged forbidden subjects into daylight.

In *A Doll's House*, as has been mentioned, he focused public attention on the woman's question and created a furore. He scattered our pious sentiments and mock chivalry. He revealed to the world the intense dissatisfaction of women with domestic life, and their subordinate place in the social system.

In *Ghosts* he dealt with the painful subject of inherited disease, and all the 'respectable' people in Europe rose up in their wrath and abused him.

In *An Enemy of the People* he retorted by showing how massed prejudice can destroy a fearless man who wants to save his fellows.

In *The Wild Duck* he laughed at the extremist, including himself, and showed the necessity for making a compromise with the enemy.

These 'social dramas' were written when Ibsen was a mature man, after years of unflinching thought on the problems with which he deals.

His private life was very much what might have been inferred from his works. He was the son of a merchant who went bankrupt, and at fifteen instead of going to a school of art or to a university he was apprenticed to a chemist. The narrowness of the life galled him intolerably, and as soon as his apprenticeship was finished he went to Christiania (Oslo) with a vague intention of becoming a doctor.

Having the brain of a thinker and the temperament of an agitator, young Ibsen drifted into journalism and politics. He ran theatres in Bergen and Christiania and gained much valuable experience of theatrecraft, but his ill-luck was persistent, and his criticisms of his native country made it too hot for him. He became an exile in 1864 and lived in Rome, Dresden, and Munich for twenty-five years.

The dramatic poems, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, were written in Italy, and they were given an enthusiastic reception. He won a

European reputation, and Norway gave him the pension which he had sought for years. When he returned home at the age of sixty-three he grimly enjoyed the hero-worship bestowed upon him by the people who had driven him away. He died at the age of seventy-eight.

The contrast between the life of Ibsen and, say, that of Sheridan is noteworthy. Sheridan had finished his career as a dramatist at the age of twenty-eight, but Ibsen's important plays did not appear until he was nearly forty, and his great prose dramas were written after he was fifty. One usually associates revolutionary ardour with extreme youth, and it often happens that a man becomes more conciliatory when he reaches middle age. Ibsen's passionate desire for reform was the expression of a mature mind and a balanced judgment. His thoughts had been trained like an army, and their march was as irresistible as that of the Roman legions against a mob of barbarians.

The twentieth-century playgoer, accustomed to the plays of Shaw, Galsworthy, Granville-Barker, Somerset Maugham, and others, fails to realize the audacity of these dramas of Ibsen. The modern theatre is as daring as the law will allow, and continually demands greater freedom. The modern dramatist finds all the raw material of comedy and tragedy in ordinary life, and he writes in the new technique, as Monsieur Jourdain spoke prose, without knowing that he is doing it.

The old theatricality of the heroic tragedy and the Victorian melodrama is as dead as the old systems of astronomy before Newton. Ibsen is no longer alive, but his race survives and carries on the great work.

Bernard Shaw declared that the influence which Ibsen has had in England was equal to the influence which three revolutions, six crusades, a couple of foreign invasions, and an earthquake would produce. His influence was equally strong in Germany, and playwrights like Holz, Schlaf, Hauptmann, Sudermann, and Wildenbruch may be said to be directly indebted to him. The Latin countries responded less quickly, and at

last France ceased to be the dominating power in European drama.

In 1887, however, the Théâtre Libre was established in Paris and followed the new traditions for nine years. In 1889 Die Freie Bühne opened in Berlin, and from it there came the organization of people's theatres all over Germany. In England a liberating movement began in 1891 with the Independent Theatre under J. T. Grein, and having Meredith, Hardy, Pinero, and H. A. Jones on its advisory board. During the seven years of its existence it produced twenty-six new and translated plays, including the first play of Bernard Shaw. The Repertory movement, which is profoundly significant, is described in a later chapter.

The theatre everywhere was shaking itself free from the traditions of the past. Prose took the place of verse; playwrights wrote boldly about contemporary interests; melodrama was driven out by realism; a more intelligent audience began to visit the theatres; and a new style of production was brought into being to suit the new kind of acting and the needs of the naturalistic drama. The stage ceased to be a public platform for orators: it became a room with the fourth wall missing, where people appeared to be talking to one another as intimately as they would do in actual life.

DRAMATISTS OF OUR OWN TIME—I

CRITICS are of the opinion that the two greatest epochs in the story of drama are the Elizabethan and the present day, but the selection of special names is a difficult task. There are bound to be serious omissions and differences of opinion—that is inevitable where there is no absolute standard—but the four writers who are dealt with in this chapter won their reputation years ago, and have consolidated their positions as representative British dramatists.

SIR JAMES BARRIE

Details of the early life of Sir James Barrie are so well known that they may be dismissed in a few words. His boyhood was spent in a Scottish village, which he described in *A Window in Thrums* and *Auld Licht Idylls*. He was an assistant teacher in school for a short time, but quickly escaped into journalism in Nottingham and then in London. He wrote short stories, novels, and plays. *My Lady Nicotine* is a collection of humorous stories dealing with tobacco; *Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel* are novels in which humour is blended with pathos to form an original compound which is familiar to all who know the plays; and *The Little Minister* is a romantic story of a plucky young minister and a beautiful but mischievous gipsy-girl. The play, based upon this theme, was immensely popular in the 'nineties, but on its revival a few years ago its appeal was less powerful. The play had not changed in the least; the change was in the audience. Ideas that seemed daring and even scandalous in Queen Victoria's reign had been accepted by the general public, and the romantic sentiment, in an age which affects to have no time for sentiment, did not make the strong impression which it created

thirty years before. This is one of the factors for which one has to make allowance in discussing the theatre and the novel. The average audience slowly changes its tastes and ideas, just as the individual member of it changes as he grows older.

At nineteen a young man or woman probably enjoys reading *Lorna Doone*, but at twenty-nine *The Forsyte Saga* or *Clayhanger* may make a stronger appeal. The craving for romance dies down, and the desire for reality takes its place.

Sir James Barrie stood apart from other dramatists in his love of the fantastic. He tried to escape from the world of actuality into a world of make-believe. He found his inspiration in the immaterial world.

In *Dear Brutus*, for example, we are shown a curious collection of people who are invited to join a house party because they have one thing in common: they are all dissatisfied with their lives and think they could have done so much better if they could have the chance to begin all over again.

There is a butler who steals jewellery from the bedrooms, an artist who always longed for a child, but never had one, a lady who had married the wrong man, and so on. It so happens, however, that the time is Midsummer Eve, and a magic wood appears close to the house. All the dissatisfied people stray into the magic wood where the dream life comes true, where their secret wishes are realized.

The butler now reappears as a rich man (he has had his chance over again), but he is still dishonest in spite of his fur coat and his Rolls-Royce. The artist has a charming daughter who chatters to him as he paints—Margaret, who was a "Might have-been." The married people have different partners, but they still think they have made a mistake and carry on flirtations with their original wives or husbands.

The whole idea of the play goes to show that if we had another chance we should still make the same mistakes and remain unchanged at heart. It is a pessimistic idea, and people quarrel continually about it. The host at the party is a queer old man

called Lob, and we recognize in him the ancient figure of Puck, who is playing pranks on mortals as he did in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In fact, it has often been said that Sir James Barrie runs away from real life because at heart he is a cynic.

In *Mary Rose* the supernatural element is even more pronounced. The heroine suddenly vanishes to a magic island—the Island that Likes to be Visited—and returns after some time without being aware that she has been away.

But the two plays which are probably the best are *Peter Pan* (a children's play) and *The Admirable Crichton* (for politicians). *Peter Pan* was refused by manager after manager, but when it was eventually produced it became tremendously popular and brought the author a fortune. For many years it has been revived during the pantomime season immediately after Christmas, and it has been filmed with admirable skill.

The small child sees in *Peter Pan* a delightful fairy-story with a twentieth-century fairy—the boy who wouldn't grow up. He has an endless succession of thrilling adventures with pirates, wolves, Red Indians, and a house in the tree-tops in the Never-Never-Land. An adult, however, sees that the play is a sort of parable or allegory. The Never-Never-Land is the world of childish daydream. All little boys of six or seven fly off to this wonderful world as they fall asleep—killing pirates, fighting Indians, encountering wild beasts, performing deeds of lofty heroism. As soon as their curly heads touch the pillows they are off to this magical world where Peter Pan is the king! It is the world of poetry when the real world threatens to become the prosiest sort of prose.

It is more than a fairy-story, however, it is really a religion, and Peter Pan is the god, eternally young like the gods of Greece. A boy-god for little boys! Children have been taught, years ago, about a heaven where they will sing hymns and say prayers for ever and ever; but such a prospect is alarming to the average child. Barrie's idea is that the little boy who falls from his perambulator

will go to the Never-Never-Land and have wondrous adventures with Peter. And to a child that idea is heaven!

Of course, the daydream world conflicts with the real world, and Mrs Darling is heartbroken when her children have gone away.

The poor mother cannot be left in grief, and so there is a compromise. The children return home at length, but they have the right to wander off once a year to the land where no adult can follow them. Wendy's annual visit to her house (for the spring-cleaning!), where Peter is anxiously awaiting her, reminds one a little of the old Greek story of Proserpine in the house of Pluto.

There is nothing incredible or supernatural in *The Admirable Crichton*. We are shown an aristocratic family (the Earl of Loam, his three daughters, the Hon. Ernest Woolley, and others) with their multitudinous servants. The Earl of Loam has a theory that human beings are all equal, and compels the servants to come into the drawing-room and have tea, waited upon by members of the upper classes. The butler, an intelligent man and a sound Conservative, hates these monthly tea-parties. The servants do not believe in equality: there is no equality in the servants' hall.

In the second act we discover the same people in rather different circumstances. They have been yachting together, and, the yacht having been wrecked, they are cast on an island. All the social distinctions which were so important in London now disappear, but there is still no equality. The best man must be the 'king' and issue orders to the rest. He proves to be Crichton, the butler, and he is compelled to take the initiative; in fact, he is the only person in the company who has any practical ideas at all. One of the maids becomes as important as the daughters of the aristocracy. The Hon. Ernest Woolley reveals himself as useless in an emergency, and has to take orders from Crichton. The Earl of Loam himself is an utter failure, but he can chop sticks and draw water.

There is a slight rebellion against Crichton's kingship, but he gives them the chance to work under him or to remain

independent. They are allured back by the odour of the soup which he is making, and submit to his authority. Thus the castes of civilization are turned topsy-turvy, the servant becoming the lord, and the lord becoming a servant. So much for the idea of all men being equal in a state of nature!

Lady Mary, the eldest daughter, proves to be the finest woman in the party. In London she was proud, cold, indolent, and useless; but on the island she is brimful of energy, resource, and high spirits. She enjoys the experience as she had enjoyed nothing before. In Act III Crichton proposes marriage to her, and she is overjoyed, but all the other women in the party are jealous of the honour which has come to her.

Towards the end of this third act a ship is sighted. Crichton has the terrible choice of summoning the crew to rescue them and returning to London, where he will be a butler again, or of remaining on the island, where he is a king and about to marry Lady Mary. He does not hesitate for a second. "Bill Crichton must play the game!" he shouts, and gives the signal.

Many people wish that the play ended there. The fourth act is too pathetic, and is in the nature of an anti-climax. The party is back in London again. The Earl of Loam and the Hon. Ernest are now important people, and Crichton is a servant once more. Lady Mary is about to marry Lord Brocklehurst and live the thoroughly boring life of a Society lady. It is full of humour, and has moments of suspense, especially where the terrible Countess of Brocklehurst cross-examines the servants about the life on the island. On the whole we are sorry that the play ends as it does.

People who believe in the equality of man find much in the play to cause them furious thought. Was the Earl of Loam right in thinking that in a state of nature we should all be like brothers? And, most important of all, can we accept Sir James Barrie's idea that the wrong men are 'on top' in many cases, and that society would be better if it were based upon ability rather than upon birth and wealth?

It sounds revolutionary, and one wonders which political party the author would have joined if he had entered Parliament. He is clearly not a democrat, but he could hardly join the Conservatives if he thinks his lordship is inferior to his own butler?

The Admirable Crichton is one of Barrie's few attempts to deal with the problems of the real world. He much preferred to wander into the world of fantasy and imagination. In all his plays there is a rich humour, frequently compounded with sadness, and his sense of the dramatic is keen. He has the gift of provoking thought in the audience, but he does not tell them what they should think or what he thinks himself. Practically all his plays are worth seeing, but if the reader cannot see them he can always borrow a copy and study them in the 'armchair theatre.' They are admirably adapted for reading. The stage-directions are made to read like novels.

What Every Woman Knows deals with the problems of the world and contains nothing of the fantastic. It is a study of an ambitious man who fights his way up from being a railway porter to a Member of Parliament. The opening scene, showing the family lying in wait for a burglar, is excellent.

Quality Street, on the other hand, is an escape into the past—a world of Jane Austen or Mrs Gaskell. There is something feminine in its outlook on life. *A Kiss for Cinderella* is another example of Barrie's escape from the actual into a world of childish imagination. His last play, *The Boy David*, based upon the Bible story, was an interesting experiment but hardly a success.

The one-act plays are also famous, especially *The Twelve-pound Look*, *The Old Lady Shows her Medals* (which has been done at the Comédie Française), and *The Will*.

JOHN GALSWORTHY

One can imagine Galsworthy's being intensely interested in *The Admirable Crichton*, but it is probably the only Barrie play which he would like to have written. It would be difficult to

find two men more completely opposed in temperament and thought. Sir James Barrie knew that the actual world is full of cruelty, ugliness, injustice, and disenchantment; but he saved himself by flying away to magic islands and Never-Never-Lands. Galsworthy also knew this, but he faced the facts without flinching, with the air of a physician making a diagnosis of a difficult case, or the calmness of a surgeon performing a dangerous operation. He might be 'boiling' with indignation at the spectacle of human foolishness or wickedness; but he never gave himself away, never allowed his emotions to override his judgment, never ¹ lost his perfect self-control.

Galsworthy found all the material for drama in the realities of life, and had no time for wandering into the worlds of make-believe or fantasy. He was intensely in earnest, and used the stage as a pulpit to denounce the evils of the time and to advocate drastic reforms; but, unlike the propagandist, he never allowed his thesis to obtrude upon his drama. He was a dramatist first, a reformer second. His characters, like Ibsen's, are real people in real difficulties: they are not 'pieces' for the working out of his theme.

In *The Silver Box*, for example, we are shown how harshly the law punishes the poor charwoman who is unjustly accused of theft, and how leniently it treats the wealthy man whose crime is far more serious. But the administration of justice by the police-courts is only a setting or background for the real drama.

The Greek tragedies depicted men in conflict with destiny or inexorable fate: Galsworthy depicted men in conflict with the equally inexorable forces of our legal or social system. His thesis was only a symbolical proscenium arch through which one could see the struggles of a human soul.

In *Justice* we see William Falder, a young man who works in a solicitor's office, tempted to alter a cheque in order to get some money for a woman whom he loves. The need is urgent, and there is no other way. His fraud is quickly discovered, and he is

¹ "Never?—Well, hardly ever."

handed over to justice. The second act is an exceedingly accurate picture of the trial. The lawyer defending Falder makes an eloquent and moving speech, but the facts could not be denied, and the prisoner is sentenced to seven years. The third act is divided into several scenes, portraying the conditions in the prison. It is exceedingly depressing, particularly the scene, in which no word is spoken, where we see the man in his solitary cell. The mental torture of solitary confinement was thus revealed to the British public, and Mr Winston Churchill, who was then Home Secretary, was so impressed by the play that he made arrangements for relaxing the prison restrictions. The fourth act shows Falder out of prison, depressed and hopeless, unable to get a job, and finally arrested again for forging a reference with which he tries to secure work and 'make good.' Rather than go back to prison again he leaps down a flight of stone stairs and breaks his neck.

It is a very moving tragedy—the tragedy of two young people in love, made desperate, and caught in the toils of the legal system. Falder was doubtless weak to yield to the temptation, but thousands of young men have fallen before, and probably thousands will fall again. The play might serve as a terrible warning to potential law-breakers, for the law will certainly break them in revenge.

From a structural point of view critics will observe that one of the middle acts can be dispensed with. If we see Falder sentenced in Act II the prison experience can be taken for granted. If the prison scenes are necessary then we can infer the trial scene and its result.

But Galsworthy's greatest achievement in tragedy was probably *Strife*, which is based upon a strike in Wales. One sees the two sides—employers and workers, Capital versus Labour; and the author is scrupulously fair to both parties. If he shows any bias at all it is rather on the side of the men, and when we remember the author's origin—he belonged to the other class by birth—his sympathetic handling of the workers is the more

admirable. The play shows the uselessness of the strike: it ends in a compromise which might have been accepted in the beginning, and all the suffering might have been avoided. Pride and obstinacy are the blind forces which break the men who refuse to make concessions. The strong man brings tragedy upon others as well as upon himself, and the sacrifices achieve nothing whatever.

These three plays are the best-known of Galsworthy's early efforts, but although they made a profound impression on intelligent playgoers they did not win the popularity which came to his later plays. *The Skin Game*, *Loyalties*, *Escape*, *The Forest*, *Old English*, and *The Roof* were greater successes from a commercial point of view; but lovers of good drama still prefer the older plays. One critic has remarked that Galsworthy "stooped to conquer."

Escape, for example, is a sort of cinematographic picture of a convict's escape from Dartmoor. One sees his crime in the first scene; the second shows him at work with a gang of convicts on a foggy day; the succeeding scenes (eight or ten of them) reveal episodes of his escape—hiding under a bed in a Devonshire inn, disguising himself as a fisherman, stealing a motor-car belonging to a picnic-party, hiding in a quarry, his capture by a farmer, his bolt for life before the arrival of the village policeman, his treatment by two maiden ladies into whose house he rushes, his treatment by a clergyman who discovers him in the vestry—and the play ends with his surrender. Some of his encounters are amusing. It is interesting to observe the reactions of the various people with whom he comes into contact. Half of them are willing to help him to escape, the others want to give him up to justice.

Fortunately for himself, the convict was an educated gentleman and he probably gained sympathy which would have been impossible in the case of a 'real tough' of the working classes. The play caused considerable trouble when it was first produced. Members of the audience shouted out in protest against some of

the remarks of the actors. They failed to perceive that the opinion of a character in a play is not necessarily that of the author, and in the case of Galsworthy it is particularly absurd to suppose that it is. There is an example in *Escape* which illustrates his scrupulous fairness in giving both sides. When the convict rushes for protection into the house of the two maiden ladies their attitude towards him is instructive and revealing. The one who is fond of hunting and sport shows sympathy and wants to assist his escape; the other, who is extremely pious and is constantly attending services in church, shows no pity for the hunted man and wants to hand him over to justice. But the clergyman—also a devoutly religious man—is strongly inclined to mercy, and is even willing to tell a lie to save the man.

That is the characteristic of all the Galsworthy plays: holy and unholy people appear on both sides; men and women equally opposite in their reactions.

One cannot help noticing how frequently Galsworthy deals with the law and its administration in his dramas, and it is the more interesting when we discover that he was trained for the Bar. He would have made a brilliant advocate, a strictly impartial judge. But he happened to have a great desire to write novels and plays, and gave up the career which he originally started.

His fame as a novelist during his lifetime was considerable. The same qualities are seen in his stories—his keen insight into the hearts of men and women, his skill in depicting their joys and sorrows, his constant pursuit of reality. He had no time for the conventional heroes and villains of cheap fiction and melodrama: he drew people as he saw them in actual life. His greatest work is *The Forsyte Saga*, which is a trilogy of novels now printed in one volume, and its sequel, *A Modern Comedy*, includes three others. All six novels deal with the same family through three generations. Apart from the interest of the story in itself, it is a brilliant study of an English family during the past half-century.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Bernard Shaw is without doubt the greatest dramatist of our time, and one can hardly open a newspaper without seeing his name. He has an extraordinary personality, and appears to be interested in everything. His opinions about all kinds of subjects, from music to politics, from religion to science, from education to capital punishment, from vivisection to vegetarianism, are always being quoted and discussed. He has a clean-cut philosophy based upon simple logic, and he finds himself more or less alone in a world of men and women whose minds are full of unreasoned prejudices and contradictions. He is the arch-heretic of the day.

There was a time, we are told, when Shaw—a very poor man—spent his spare time in public speaking from the top of a soap-box. He was out to convince mankind that they were wrong, and to win converts to his own point of view. He has nearly always been on the unpopular side. He defended Wagner when everybody was ridiculing the great operas which are now regarded as classics; he defended Ibsen when all the newspapers were abusing him. He was an ardent Socialist when Socialism was denounced and ridiculed all over the land.

It eventually occurred to Mr Shaw that he could best propound his theories by making them into plays, and for years the plays were appreciated by a minority of intelligent people; but during the last thirty years Shaw has been accepted at his own valuation, and plays like *Saint Joan* and *Candida* have been immensely successful all over Europe and America.

If you go to hear one of his plays you are almost bound to come away thinking hard about some subject which you had previously taken for granted. He invariably suggests a new line of argument, an unexpected angle of vision. In fact, he has shown that a lively argument on the stage can be as exciting as a duel or a battle. A fact can be as deadly as a bullet; a discussion can be as thrilling as a revolution.

Shaw attacks all our venerable beliefs. He pokes fun at Shakespeare; he laughs at medical science; he has no faith in the wonderful courage of military heroes; he ridicules our British respectability; he exposes Napoleon, Julius Cæsar, and the strong, silent man; he has no time for conventional sentiment; he declines to treat marriage as the climax of a beautiful romance.

A propagandist is rarely a good dramatist, but in the case of Shaw we have to admit that the plays are excellent as plays, just as Shelley's poems are excellent poems in spite of his passion to reform the world. Earnest people are often boring to the point of exasperation, but Shaw has a lively wit and a strong sense of humour, and these qualities prevent him from killing his own cause. One can never be certain what he will say or do next. A man who was a fearless Socialist half a century ago might be expected to write a play in favour of Republicanism; but *The Apple Cart* is a perfect defence of kingship. The young man who wrote to the papers to assert that he was an atheist at a time when the Moody-and-Sankey Missions were sweeping the country might be expected to be a friend of science; but Mr Shaw distrusts the scientists as profoundly as he distrusts the 'popular parson,' and he has given the world a clear exposition of his philosophy in *Man and Superman*.

He has written plays on most of the topics of the hour. He dealt with Ireland in *John Bull's Other Island*; with the Salvation Army in *Major Barbara*; with foreign missions in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*; with the future of the human race in *Back to Methuselah*. *On the Rocks* and *Geneva* are characteristic examples of Shaw's ability to handle political questions with real criticism behind a façade of laughter.

In *You Never Can Tell* the opening scene is a dentist's surgery, and a girl is having a tooth extracted. In *Man and Superman* there is a scene with a motor-car in the middle of the stage and a pair of legs protruding from underneath. *Arms and the Man* opens in a girl's bedroom, with the sounds of a battle that is proceeding outside, and a soldier coming in for shelter.

Shaw's originality in suggesting novel scenes must not deceive us into thinking that he is a daring experimenter in the theatre. So far, with the exception of parts of *Back to Methuselah*, he has made no serious attempt to reform the conventions of the stage. He is too anxious to reach the minds of the audience to trouble about inventing a new technique: the drama is a vehicle for ideas, and he is willing to use it for all it is worth.

Still, there is always the danger of thinking of Shaw as a propagandist. He handles the same materials in comedy that the dramatist of ideas handles in deadly earnest.

"In the plays of Dumas," observes Mr Dickinson, "ideas were the explicit by-products of the action. In Ibsen ideas were implicit in the action. In Shaw ideas provide the action."

If the reader is living in a part of the country where it is impossible to see the plays of Shaw there is no difficulty about buying or borrowing them, and they are extremely good reading. Every play has a preface, frequently as long as the play itself, dealing with the subject upon which the play is based. The so-called preface is generally a brilliant treatise, analysing the subject without waste of words, and explaining the writer's conclusions without the slightest ambiguity. Shaw knows his own mind and can therefore speak with conviction; but he also knows the minds of other people, and they get their chance of a hearing as characters in the play that follows.

One should read Shaw for the fun of the thing. His wit is impish and provokes laughter even when he is attacking a venerated article of faith, or an ideal which is built upon a cherished delusion. He stimulates the mind by his outrageous pronouncements, and yet, somehow, the things which seem so shocking are often undeniably right. He may make you angry, but he will set you thinking things out for yourself.

Underneath his bewildering wit and banter Shaw is a serious man. He is interested not so much in the quack remedy or the hand-to-mouth reform of the politician as in the great evolutionary processes that shape the destiny of mankind. He has a cosmic

philosophy and sees things in wide perspective. He does not display emotion on the surface, but there are deep springs of emotion in *Candida*, *Man and Superman*, *Heartbreak House*, and *Saint Joan*.

Shaw is more than a wit, more than a reformer, more than a brilliant controversialist, more than a dramatist, more than a philosopher; he is above all else a supremely great man.

SIR ARTHUR PINERO

It has fallen to few men to write plays for over half a century, but Sir Arthur Pinero's first play was produced in 1877, and his last play, *A Cold June*, was produced in 1932. The list of his dramatic works is considerable, running to well over forty plays, and they reveal an extraordinary versatility. He began with farces or farcical comedies, but went on to more serious work—Ibsenian psychological plays, problem plays, naturalistic plays, fantastic plays, and serious comedies which verge upon the tragic.

He had the mind and temperament of the born playwright, and, as he was an actor with Irving before he started writing, his practical knowledge of theatrecraft was of enormous advantage. Shakespeare and Ibsen, Drinkwater and Granville-Barker learned the ropes as producers of plays, and, although this experience of routine work in the theatre is not indispensable to a dramatist, it is certainly an asset to be able to grasp the conditions under which play production must be done.

Every writer on recent drama has praised Sir Arthur Pinero for his extremely efficient craftsmanship. William Archer, in his manual on *Play-making*, quotes Pinero over and over again. We are permitted to know something of the playwright's methods of work:

Before beginning to write a play I always make sure, by means of a definite scheme, that there is a way of doing it; but whether I ultimately follow that way is a totally different matter. . . . I never go

on to page two until I am sure that page one is as right as I can make it. Indeed, when an act is finished, I send it at once to the printers, confident that I shall not have to go back upon it.

Sir Arthur confessed that he thought of the characters first, got to know them thoroughly, and "they tell me the story." This was not the method of his contemporary Henry Arthur Jones, who declared that he could not think of characters apart from action. Each man had his own opinion, of course, but neither of them started with a plot and then invented characters to execute it. A play manufactured in that way will never by any chance become drama.

Both Jones and Pinero were regarded as revolutionaries, and both were exceedingly successful in the commercial theatre. They were strongly influenced by the new experiments on the Continent, and keenly conscious of the thoughts and feelings that were agitating the minds and hearts of English people. But Jones was more emphatically the preacher on social questions, and his audacity carried him a trifle too far, whereas Pinero stopped in time.

His early farces and light comedies were no imitations. The farce of the 'eighties was usually an adaptation from the French, and was as naughty as the Censor would permit in Victorian times; but Pinero's farces were robustly English—e.g., *The Magistrate*, *The Hobby Horse*, *Sweet Lavender*, *The Amazons*, and *Dandy Dick*. *The Amazons* is interesting to modern people because it expresses the late Victorian point of view on the subject of athletics for women. *Dandy Dick* introduces a masculine type of woman whose whole life is concentrated on horseflesh. She enters the room in a riding-habit, carrying a whip, and every time she speaks she pours forth torrents of 'horsy' metaphors. As she is visiting the home of her brother, a pious and scholarly-minded clergyman, the incongruity of the contrast makes the chief fun of the play.

Pinero's farces are occasionally revived with success—e.g., *The Magistrate* in 1943 and *Dandy Dick* a few years earlier. His

serious plays, on which his great reputation rests, reveal a mind that had thought deeply about the problems that were perplexing the earnest people of those days. *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsworth*, *The Benefit of the Doubt*, *The Gay Lord Quex*, *The Profligate*, *Iris*, *Letty*, *His House in Order*, *Mid-Channel*, *The 'Mind-the-Paint' Girl* (which Mr Shaw recommended to students of sociology for its shrewd social comments), are all well known, and it is difficult to place them in order of importance.

His House in Order is often extolled for its excellence of construction, but the theme is so intensely dramatic that one is apt to lose sight of the craftsmanship that underlies it. The heroine of the play, Nina, is the second wife of Filmer Jesson, but she is continually being offered up as a sacrifice on the altar dedicated to the memory of the first wife. All the relations of the sainted Annabel surround Nina, continually reminding her of her own unworthiness, and making her life a torment. Her husband, who might have been expected to have more tact, even if he had not human kindness, is for ever praising the first wife, making Nina feel humiliated and angry. Then it comes to Nina's knowledge, through the discovery of hidden letters, that Annabel was no saint at all—that she was on the point of eloping with a secret lover at the moment when she was unfortunately killed in an accident.

"By a single word," said William Archer, "she [Nina] could overturn the altar of her martyrdom and shatter the dearest illusions of her persecutors. Shall she speak that word, or shall she not? Here is a crisis. . . ."

Nothing can be more momentous than the choice before Nina. There is a peculiar crispness of effect when the two alternatives are clearly set forth, and one has to wait for the outcome of the mental struggle. Similar scenes may be found in *Coriolanus* (Act V, Scene 3), the scene between Ellida, Wangel, and the Stranger in *The Lady from the Sea* (Ibsen), and in the final scene of Shaw's *Candida*.

Pinero's altogether charming *Trelawny of the 'Wells,'* which is included in the volume of *Great Modern British Plays*,¹ is a period play recalling the stage manners of the 'sixties—a time-less play, jejune in actual story, but grandly rich in characterization.

The dialogue of most of Pinero's characters may strike a modern as 'rotund'—as if the speakers had been brought up in the offices of old-fashioned solicitors. It is necessary to remember that they lived in a more leisurely age, when it was the custom to finish a sentence, and not to talk in the Impressionist style of the present century. In *Trelawny of the 'Wells'* the conversation is deliberately 'period,' since it belongs to eighty years ago; but in *The Gay Lord Quex* and *Mid-Channel* the conversation has become dated through subsequent changes of fashion.

There were years when Pinero was out to amuse or entertain, and other years when he was out to set people thinking and revising their sense of values; he did both with dramatic effectiveness. But the chief difference between him and Bernard Shaw is that he did not attempt to do both things at the same time.

Shaw can make ideas vital and dramatic, and he expresses them through his characters in their arguments with one another; Pinero makes the action dramatic, and the idea materializes from the incidents as a sort of inevitable corollary.

¹ Harrap.

DRAMATISTS OF OUR OWN TIME—II

SEAN O'CASEY

THE dramatic movement in Ireland had two distinct sources. The first was due to a group of writers, Yeats, George Moore, "Æ," Lady Gregory, and others, who started the Irish Literary Theatre; the other was derived from the common life of the people, which was clamouring for self-expression. The pioneers of the latter movement were the Fays, and in *The Story of Ireland's National Theatre*, by Dawson Byrne, there is an account of their early struggles and eventual success.

The greatest dramatist of the Irish movement was undoubtedly J. M. Synge, whose *Riders to the Sea* is a masterpiece among one-act plays, but *The Playboy of the Western World*, which caused so much trouble in Ireland, is generally regarded as his finest achievement.

Padraic Colum, Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, Lennox Robinson, and several other playwrights associated with the Abbey Theatre have done admirable work, but the name of Sean O'Casey is outstanding. O'Casey has been doing for the Dublin slums what Synge did for the peasantry of Aran Islands. He was a labourer in Dublin, and knew the life there from intimate personal experience. His first play, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, was written for a Christmas party at Liberty Hall, the headquarters of a Labour union, and was so well received that O'Casey was persuaded to send it to the Abbey Theatre, where it became an instantaneous success. His next play, *Juno and the Paycock*, was one of the greatest triumphs in the history of the Abbey Theatre, and on the first night of its production the audience went wild with delight, and called insistently for the author. O'Casey was hiding in the stalls, too panic-stricken to

make his appearance on the stage, but Mr Lennox Robinson solved the difficulty by carrying the author into the lime-light.

The Plough and the Stars, which many critics regard as O'Casey's masterpiece, had a very different reception. There was an uproar in the theatre, a free fight on the stage itself, and Yeats, who tried to address the mob from the front of the curtain, was unable to make himself heard. On the succeeding night the angry crowd took 'stink-bombs' into the theatre, but the police were unable to discover the perpetrators of the offence. The play is a realistic drama dealing with the Irish Revolution in 1916—a study of Irish character with all its inconsistencies, with farce merging into comedy, comedy into drama, love and hate running rampant in a whimsical topsy-turvy. But through it all there is a broad characterization that only one who has loved and suffered among these people could have the talent to sketch with such sharp outlines.

The Silver Tassie, O'Casey's war play, was sharply criticized before it was produced in London; but whatever may be said against it from a producer's or a dramatist's point of view the play was tremendously powerful on the stage. O'Casey is an uncompromising realist who follows his own dramatic instincts, and whether he keeps the rules or not he certainly succeeds in 'putting it across.'

O'Casey's next play of importance brought a surprise and a certain amount of bewilderment. *Within the Gates* revealed him in revolt against the realism which he had apparently abandoned for ever. The new play was expressionist: it attempts to portray a group of people in Hyde Park, not superficially (as a passer-by might see them), but in their inmost selves. The characters speak their secret thoughts aloud; several of them repeat the same words simultaneously; they speak in verse or prose as the mood demands.

The play failed because the ordinary public could not make 'head or tail' of it. What Mr O'Casey will give us next we

cannot guess, but at the moment he might be described as the poetic dramatist of Communism.

A. A. MILNE

Milne, who is a Scotsman, has made his fame three times over. He contributed to *Punch* when he was still an undergraduate at Cambridge, and on leaving the university joined the staff and soon became the sub-editor. His essays, published in a series of volumes, are distinguished by a great charm of style and delicate humour. His children's poems, *When We were Very Young* and *Now We are Six*, appeal principally to adults, but children are enthusiastic about the prose stories, *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*.

Milne began to write plays to while away leisure hours when he was serving as a soldier in the last war. Judging by his own account of the experiment, he did it for fun, just as other men went for joy-rides or played at cards. He certainly did not write because he was conscious of an urgent message, or impelled by some deep inward conflict which demanded expression. Practically all his plays are light-hearted comedies. He has no craving to write about sins and sinners, men with a dark past, women with clandestine love-affairs; he prefers the pleasant people one may meet in a country house-party.

Mr Pim Passes By is about a harmless old gentleman who calls casually at a house and manages to let fall some little remark which creates a 'situation.' He calls a second time, and unwittingly makes things more complicated. In fact, every reappearance of Mr Pim—absent-minded old fellow as he is—invariably leads to scenes, although he himself remains perfectly unaware of the mischief he is making.

The Truth About Blayds, *The Dover Road*, *The Fourth Wall*, *Belinda*, *To Have the Honour*, *Michael and Mary*, and *The Romantic Age* are all typical Milne comedies, and there are several good one-act plays, including *The Boy Comes Home*, *Wurzel-Flummery*,

and a farce, *The Man with the Bowler Hat*. His dramatic instincts and his genius in writing for children combined when he wrote *Toad of Toad Hall*, a Christmas holiday-play suggested by Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Somerset Maugham's first play was written in German and produced in Berlin; but while he was still a medical student in London he wrote a powerful realistic novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, which reveals remarkable gifts of observation, insight, and an intimate knowledge of the life he describes, as well as the indispensable art of achieving a precise effect in a minimum of words. His literary style is strong and simple, and he knows by instinct that one word is always better than two. Mr Ivor Brown put it that he sends his plays out like race-horses, trained to the last hair.

Maugham's career as a dramatist began with a tragedy, *A Man of Honour*, but his mood brightened and he wrote farces, light comedies, satirical comedies, and dramas. He is regarded as a cynic, but he has a lively wit and a keen sense of humour, while his competence in constructing plays is exceptional. It appeared that after the mere *succès d'estime* of his first play Mr Maugham contented himself by writing for the box-office. He did it to admiration: he had four plays running simultaneously.

Then a change became apparent. He wrote his best and most personal novel, *Of Human Bondage*, and he turned in drama to his superbly effective attack upon those public nuisances, *Our Betters*, and to his unsentimental comedy of modern love, *The Circle*.

These two plays stand out, but Maugham had abandoned the epigram. He was a serious playwright, and a point recently raised about dramatic criticism is relevant. In farce like *Home and Beauty* the target was low and a bull's eye was scored; in *Sheppey* the target was high and the play was a near miss. *The Sacred*

Flame was denounced by the Bishop of London and thereby given a gratuitous advertisement. *The Breadwinner*, a study of a man's revolt against his wife and family, will be referred to later on.

Other plays worth mentioning are *Jack Straw* and *Mrs Dot* (both farces); *Lady Frederick*, *The Land of Promise*, and *Cæsar's Wife* (three comedies); *East of Suez*, *The Tenth Man*, and *The Letter* (which, for lack of a better name, may be called dramas).

The Moon and Sixpence, which was written as a novel, and *Sadie Thompson*, which is a long story, have been dramatized by other people, the latter being rechristened *Rain*.

FREDERICK LONSDALE

Frederick Lonsdale has all the qualifications of a successful writer of comedy. He constructs a good plot, he creates characters with considerable skill, he has an ear for dialogue, and, best of all, he is endowed with the finest flower of theatrical wit.

It is difficult, and fortunately quite unnecessary, to say which is his best work. *On Approval* and *The High Road* are excellent, but so are his *Canaries Sometimes Sing*, *The Last of Mrs Cheyney*, and *Aren't We All?*

Lonsdale does not pretend to be an innovator either in theatrical 'form' or in thought. He has not been driven to write because he has a message for the age: he sees the comic side of life inevitably, and probably enjoys playwriting for its own sake. Incidentally he gives pleasure to other people, and if he can make us laugh at ourselves so much the better.

NOEL COWARD

Noel Coward is an actor, a composer, a librettist, a playwright, and a theatrical genius who is still at the height of his powers. He has an instinctive sense of the theatre, and, even more fortunately, an uncanny knowledge of the right play at the right time.

This happy faculty was best illustrated by *Cavalcade*. Drury Lane was our national theatre when *Cavalcade* was performed; and the pageant of the English spirit from the Boer War to the 'twenties was exquisitely timed to evoke the past and to rebuke contemporary flippancies. Theatrically it coped triumphantly with the vast Drury Lane proscenium, and in content it was distinguished by a passionate sincerity unparalleled in Coward's work till he composed the war film of the Navy, *In Which We Serve*.

His best-known plays are *Easy Virtue*, *Fallen Angels*, *Hay Fever*, *The Queen was in the Parlour*, *The Vortex*, and *The Young Idea*, all of which are clever, witty in dialogue, and at times rather shocking to people who are unfamiliar with the outrageous ideas and candid utterances of modern youth.

Coward composes songs (words and music), and will sing them if necessary. He also writes revues and operettes. *This Year of Grace* is an exceedingly amusing entertainment, and *Bitter Sweet* (which had a long run at His Majesty's) is a remarkable achievement as a 'one-man show.' *Private Lives* is an astonishing exhibition of an all-round knowledge of the theatre used entirely in the interest of flippancy. On the other hand, *Post-mortem* is serious and satirical—an attempt to escape from flippancy to didacticism. There seems to be nothing in the theatrical world which he is incapable of doing.

He wrote a series of one-act plays under the title *To-night at 8.30*, and had the audacity in war-time to produce a farce about death which, running phenomenally, provokes the thought that the popular farce of the first World War was *A Little Bit of Fluff*, and of the second *Blithe Spirit*. Public taste would seem to have improved.

ST JOHN ERVINE

St John Ervine began his career as an Ulster playwright, and in his early plays he reminds one of Galsworthy. *Mixed Marriage*

has a double conflict—viz., Catholic versus Protestant, and employer versus labourer. The heroine, Nora, is a Catholic and becomes engaged to the son of the hero, John Rainey, whose sympathies are Orange. The ending is tragic, for Nora is killed by a stray bullet fired by the soldiers who have been called in to preserve order. *John Ferguson* is another grim theme, and is best described as a domestic tragedy worthy to be placed with Maschfield's *Nan*.

Ervine escaped from Ulster to the London back streets with *Jane Clegg*, a fine play depicting the courage of a woman in the midst of disaster and sordid surroundings.

After this fine beginning the dramatist apparently suffered a change of heart, and seemed deliberately to bid for popularity which, after two efforts (*Anthony and Anna* and *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary*—both light comedies), he found with *The First Mrs Fraser*. This last, his greatest commercial success, is an exceedingly well-made and effective play. *Robert's Wife*, which might be considered another bid for popular success, was less effective.

JOHN DRINKWATER

Drinkwater was a poet, and his first impulse as a playwright was to write in verse. He gave us several one-act plays in verse (*Cophetua*, *Rebellion*, $X = O$) and a poetic drama entitled *Mary Stuart*; but his great success came when he turned to prose and wrote the famous chronicle plays—*Abraham Lincoln*, *Robert E. Lee*, and *Oliver Cromwell*. This fact is highly significant of the modern feeling for actuality in the theatre.

Abraham Lincoln was a triumphant success on both sides of the Atlantic. The career of the great President is portrayed in a series of scenes which illustrate the critical moments and the dominating qualities of that remarkable man. One sees his occasional eccentricities, his deeply religious nature, his stubbornness, his warmth of sympathy, his unflinching courage, and the final scene, of

course, deals with his assassination. The play is profoundly moving.

Drinkwater was versatile, and he could jump from serious drama to a happy, carefree comedy like *Bird in Hand*. The title of this play was derived from the name of a village public-house, and the play is rustic comedy. But whereas the rustic comedy of Mr Phillpotts (*The Farmer's Wife*, *Yellow Sands*, etc.) failed to appeal to the audiences in America, Drinkwater's comedy was a very big success, both with professionals and amateurs.

A dramatist must have an instinctive sense of the dramatic *plus* a sense of the theatre, but when, like Drinkwater, he has had practical experience of running a Repertory company his acquired knowledge is an enormous advantage. His work in Birmingham was twice blessed.

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

In the annual competitions arranged some years ago by the British Drama League for amateur societies the plays of Harold Brighouse came second in order of popularity, being exceeded only by those of Sir James Barrie. The fact is significant, but not surprising, for Mr Brighouse is essentially a Repertory dramatist, and as a writer of one-act plays he is unsurpassed.

When a theatrical producer or a professional actor turns playwright there is always the danger that he will, consciously or unconsciously, find his raw material in the plays of other men. Literary people are apt to 'take in each other's washing,' and their work is too often derivative even when it is not frankly imitative. The only truly original drama is inspired by life itself; Sean O'Casey found it in the Dublin slums, and Brighouse found it in the industrialism of the North. *Hobson's Choice*, which made such an impression on London and America, and ultimately became an international play, put Lancashire on the stage—Lancashire, with its racy dialogue, its rich indigenous character, its quaint philosophy, and its inimitable humour. It is a comedy, of

course, and the three leading characters are 'creations' deserving a place in any gallery of English comic portraiture.

The Northerners is a tragic drama of the Luddites, but the greater part of Brighouse's work is comedy. *Garside's Career*, *Zack*, *Mary's John*, *Safe amongst the Pigs*, *What's Bred in the Bone*, and *It's a Gamble* are all in the English tradition of comedy. The author has not restricted himself to industrialism: he has taken numerous excursions into fantasy, and is well known for his delightful open-air plays like *Maypole Morning*, *The Prince who was a Piper*, *The Laughing Mind*, and *How the Weather is Made*. *The Odd Man Out* is a witty farce, and *Coincidence*, which opens on a carnival night in Paris, is as far removed from grim industrialism as it is possible to go.

His one-act plays, in addition to the open-air plays already mentioned, include *Lonesome-like*, *The Price of Coal*, *Followers*, *The Happy Hangman*, *The Oak Settle*, *Maid of France*, *Smoke-screens*, and *Passport to Romance*.

ARNOLD BENNETT

Although Arnold Bennett is no longer with us, he is emphatically a dramatist of our own time. His best plays—*What the Public Wants*, *The Great Adventure*, and the three-period play, entitled *Milestones* (written in collaboration with Edward Knoblock)—will not be lightly forgotten; but his fame as a novelist is likely to endure longer than his fame as a playwright. *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Riceman Steps* may be regarded as classics, and upon these two books, and to a slightly less degree upon the *Clayhanger* trilogy, his future reputation will probably rest.

Arnold Bennett was several persons in one. During his lifetime he was regarded as an accomplished man of the world, a lover of luxury, a business man who achieved brilliant success in literature; but his friends assure us that the self-confident man was a mask of the real Bennett who was extremely modest and sensitive. As a writer he had three or four distinct rôles: he was

an essayist and critic of books; he was a playwright of undeniable ability; he was a novelist with a lofty standard and an artistic conscience; he was a writer of 'pot-boilers' and *feuilletons*; and he was a sort of lay preacher who taught his contemporaries the art of making the most of life. As a serious novelist his supreme qualification was his intense interest in men and women, and he excelled in depicting the wealthy man and the middle-class woman. He knew his native county through and through, and placed the Five Towns on the literary map. He craved for reality, for the truth (romantic or unromantic) about life. And these qualities, combined with skill in construction, an ear for dialogue, a pleasant wit, and a horror for whatever was hackneyed in speech or in situation, made Bennett a playwright who was always theatrically effective and at times profoundly moving.

MONCKTON HOFFE

Monckton Hoffer has written two comedies, *The Faithful Heart* and *The Little Damozel*, two or three dramas, *Christilinda* and *The Crooked Friday*; but his *Many Waters* is undoubtedly his greatest work. It follows Galsworthy's *Escape* in structure, representing the life of an ordinary English couple in a series of scenes depicting the crises of what is usually regarded as an uneventful existence. The play makes one realize that there is the material for drama in the life of any ordinary man or woman provided one has the insight and sympathy to perceive it. The experience of daily life has been translated into the true idiom of the theatre. *Many Waters* is a finely realistic play, amusing and pathetic by turns, but the cumulative effect is deeply moving.

J. B. PRIESTLEY

The name of J. B. Priestley is well known to millions of people, partly for his novels (notably *The Good Companions*, which was a best-seller in 1929), partly for his broadcast Post-scripts in the early days of the war, and partly for his plays.

His best play, from a critic's point of view, is *Eden End*; but he has achieved distinct success with *Dangerous Corner*, *Laburnum Grove*, *Cornelius*, and the farcical *When We are Married*. Mr Priestley is an imaginative playwright. He became interested in speculations about the nature of time, and introduced the theme in *Time and the Conways* and *I Have Been Here Before*. His political thinking about an ideal world is strikingly expounded in *They Came to a City*—a play which studies in fantasy a selected group of typical people as they are shown the dream city of the future. It might be described as the indirect approach to sociology.

JAMES BRIDIE

When James Bridie wrote a play called *The Anatomist* we recalled that he was a Glasgow physician by profession, but the majority of his plays deal with Biblical or theological subjects rather than medical: *Tobias and the Angel*, *Jonah and the Whale*, *Susannah and the Elders*, and his latest is *Mr Bolfry*—a play about the devil.

Of a different character may be cited *A Storm in a Teacup*, *The Black Eye*, and *Marriage is no Joke*. But his biggest success so far has been made with *A Sleeping Clergyman*—a powerful drama which aroused a great deal of speculation as to its meaning. Why does the clergyman sleep through the entire play? Can it be that the figure was a symbol of the Church which is accused of being unconscious of modern problems? Alternatively, is it an argument in favour of faith in Divine Providence? The author did not enlighten us. He deliberately left us guessing. But he is by no means the first playwright to do that.

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

When *Young Woodley* made its appearance in London few people had heard the name of the author, but the play evoked enthusiasm as well as criticism. The play, dealing as it does with

the older boys in a public school, treats of the poignancy and tragedy of early love. Young Woodley had the misfortune to fall in love with the young wife of one of the housemasters—a situation which is usually regarded as ludicrous or farcical; but Van Druten showed us that 'calf-love' can be both beautiful and agonizing. His dramatic ability is seen in his excellent dialogue (he has caught the upper-form idiom perfectly) and in his subtle characterization.

After All is in many respects a better play—the work of a more mature mind. It deals with an old theme, the conflict between parents and children, but it goes further than other plays and is less lop-sided in its sympathies. It has a wider range than, say, *The Younger Generation*, and although it does not pretend to solve the difficulty, it does state the pros and cons with obvious fairness. *After All* is a dramatization of a phase of modern life: it is not a propagandist play. It reveals human character: it does not preach a sermon or enunciate a Magna Charta of young people's rights. Something similar may be said about his *London Wall*, which is a study of life in a solicitor's office.

Mr Van Druten's early play *Diversion* is a tragedy in three acts, and he has also dramatized Miss Rebecca West's war novel *The Return of the Soldier*.

MISS CLEMENCE DANE

Miss Clemence Dane is one of the very few women playwrights who have a sense of the theatre and an instinctive knowledge of what makes good drama. She has been an actress and is a fine lecturer, but she made her name as a novelist with *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*, and as a dramatist with *Naboth's Vineyard*, *Mariners*, *Granite*, *Will Shakespeare* (a fine play in verse), and *A Bill of Divorcement*. The last was her greatest feat: it is a powerful theme which arrests the attention in a few moments and holds it to the end. With the exception of Elizabeth Baker, no other woman has handled a tragic subject with so much strength.

But for sheer theatrical flair the name of Miss Dodie Smith must be mentioned. The idiom is sentimental, the stories are a trifle thin, the observation is remarkable for evoking nostalgic sympathy. *Call It a Day* is domestic comedy studied through keenly perceived character.

Light comedy and the superficially haphazard had a pre-war vogue, the significant examples being *George and Margaret*, by Gerald Savory (author of a grim North Country novel), and *French without Tears*, by Terence Rattigan, author of the R.A.F. play *Flare Path*. On more serious comedy Chekhov's influence is discernible. *Musical Chairs* is a case in point. The accidental death of its author, Ronald Mackenzie, took from us a young playwright of exceptional promise.

EUGENE O'NEILL

Eugene O'Neill is not only the most significant dramatist in America, he is one of the most significant dramatists of the day. We do not extol him, as we extol Somerset Maugham or Frederick Lonsdale, for his dexterous skill and theatrical craftsmanship; we feel about him, as we feel about O'Casey, that he has something urgent to say, and that he is still trying to find the best way of saying it. There is a sort of dark elemental strength in both men which is liable to smash its way through all the dramatic rules.

O'Neill has had an adventurous life and has never settled down. He has been a secretary to a mail-order firm, a gold-pro prospector, an assistant manager to a theatrical company, an able-bodied seaman, a reporter, and half a dozen other things. "I wanted," he declared, "to be a two-fisted Jack London 'he-man' sailor, to knock 'em cold and eat 'em alive"; but unhappily his health failed, and he was compelled to go to a sanatorium. The enforced idleness was a turning-point in his life. He read voraciously, thought feverishly, and developed a wild desire to write dramas about the life he had known on his vagabondage.

His plays, like his life, do not conform to the orthodox rules,

and he is an experimentalist in new forms. *The Emperor Jones* (in which Paul Robeson played the part of a Negro king) was written in eight quick scenes; *Diff'rent* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* are divided into two acts; *The Straw* is a three-act drama which takes place in a sanatorium; *The Great God Brown* is an expressionist fantasy in three acts with a prologue and an epilogue; *Anna Christie* (a great and passionate drama) is divided into four acts. There are also some strongly wrought one-act plays, many of them dealing with seafaring folk.

Perhaps *Strange Interlude* has aroused more controversy than any other play during recent years. It is described as a psychological drama in nine scenes, and is remarkable because it makes use of the 'aside' and the soliloquy to express the secret thoughts of the characters. The 'aside' was banished in the post-Ibsen drama because it destroyed the illusion of reality, but it is impossible to appreciate *Strange Interlude* without accepting the old convention. The play deals with a woman, the central character, and the various men who come into her life—her father, her romantic dead lover, her husband, her secret lover, her man friend, etc. We are permitted to overhear her thoughts concerning each one of them, and their thoughts concerning her. The frankness of the thoughts is often amusing and occasionally a trifle shocking!

Other plays of O'Neill's which are worthy of special attention are *Desire under the Elms* (which the Censor, until 1940, banned from public performance although it could be seen before the lifting of the ban at private theatres like the Gate), *Ah Wilderness*, a happy nostalgic comedy of the America of his youth, and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Greek tragedy in New England, first done in London at the Westminster Theatre. This last was immensely moving—a play that is an unforgettable experience.

A small curiosity is that his religious play, *Days without End*, was done during the war by C.E.M.A. and taken to Welsh mining villages.

The list of O'Neill's plays is considerable and is increasing. It

is impossible to place him in a category, because he cannot be labelled. One may say that on the whole he is a tragic dramatist, intensely realistic, and that he is continually creating original forms not so much because he wants to invent a new technique, but because the usual forms are inadequate to convey what he desires to express.

OTHER AMERICAN DRAMATISTS

Perhaps it was a mistake to mention Eugene O'Neill, since he is an American, and this book is mainly about British playwrights. It was not that he 'slipped in,' but that he was too big to be left out. But there are many other Americans to-day who are doing remarkably fine work for the theatre, and to do anything like justice to them they would require a whole volume.

In the circumstances one can only mention some of the best known in a random and somewhat cursory manner.

Elmer Rice became known to us in this country first by his powerful expressionist play *The Adding Machine*, but he 'arrived' with a tragic piece of realism, *Street Scene*, a New York tenement play which telescoped a whole lifetime within a few short hours, and a melodrama entitled *Counsellor-at-Law* in which Mr Hugh Miller brilliantly played the leading rôle. See *Naples and Die*, *Two on an Island*, and *Judgment Day* are other examples of his surprising versatility.

Sidney Howard, who died in 1939 (not to be confused with our own comedian, Sydney Howard), is known in this country by *They Knew What They Wanted*, *The Silver Cord*, and *The Late Christopher Bean*, a serious French play turned into a comedy of New England, and thence adapted for performance over here. It was a riotous success on both stage and screen.

Philip Barry's name is associated with *Hotel Universe*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *The Animal Kingdom*, and *Paris Bound*; Maxwell Anderson's with *Winterset* and *High Tor*; Paul Green's with *The House of Connolly*, *In Abraham's Bosom*, *The Lost Colony*, and

The Highland Call. Then there are Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* and *Golden Boy*; Marc Connelly's *Green Pastures* (banned by the Censor over here because the Deity is represented on the stage), Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (which ran in America for years and years), and two newspaper plays—*Front Page*, by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, and *Late Night Final*, by Louis Westenkorn.

Robert Sherwood's anti-war play, *Idiot's Delight*, was done with success in London, but this, like most of the plays mentioned in this list, reaches a wider public through the film version. It has been seriously suggested that the best interpreters of America through drama are the writers of farces and farcical comedies such as *You Can't Take It with You* and *My Sister Eileen*. George S. Kaufman, often with Moss Hart or Marc Connelly in collaboration, is a prolific writer of characteristically American plays, of which *Beggar on Horseback*, *Dinner at Eight*, and *The Man who Came to Dinner* are typical examples. The name of Joseph Fields has recently become familiar.

English acting, often fumbling, now has the measure of American farce.

But an attempt to write about American drama reminds one of the classic hero who lopped off the heads of a dragon only to discover that for every head he removed three others appeared. There are still a number of quite important people who have not been mentioned: Thornton Wilder, William Saroyan, S. N. Behrman, John Steinbeck, and Robert Ardrey. Mention should be made, too, of Walter Hackett, the British-born author of typically English plays like *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure*, and (in collaboration with Roi Cooper Megrue) *It Pays to Advertise*.

Of women playwrights the name of Susan Glaspell is immediately associated with *Inheritors*, but more recently we have heard of Lillian Hellman, who has given us *Children's Hour*, *The Little Foxes*, and *Watch on the Rhine*. And one cannot omit Clare Boothe, who made an indictment not of a nation but of a whole sex in *The Women*.

THE REPERTORY MOVEMENT

IT is difficult, if not impossible, to give a clear definition of Repertory. To begin with, a Repertory theatre is not a theatre with a *répertoire*, and although a Repertory company is a stock company, it does not follow that a stock company is a Repertory company. Harold Brighouse once observed that repertory (like Boston) is a state of mind, adding that one man's opinion of what is a Repertory play differs from another's. It is all very puzzling, but it comes nearer to the truth than any other attempt at definition.

In his excellent book *The Twentieth-century Theatre* Frank Vernon makes some illuminating remarks on the subject. He says:

The Repertory Queen¹ hated the word 'repertory' and never used it. It is no doubt a misnomer, but some word must be used to indicate the difference between those stock companies which regularly produced new plays in addition to reviving old ones, and the ordinary stock company which uses old plays only. There was a difference, too, in the kind of play, and the word 'repertory' has established itself as the name of the permanent local theatre with a permanent company reviving good plays and producing new plays with a little more regard for their artistic values than for their immediate drawing power.

The West End theatre is intent on making money at all costs; it produces the sort of play which will attract the crowds, and whether it is good drama or merely rubbish matters little if the box-office returns are satisfactory. An unknown dramatist with real genius has small chance of being accepted by the commercial theatre, but the Repertory theatre which prefers good work to financial success will give him a chance. There are similar anomalies in all branches of art.

¹ Miss Horniman.

But to keep to the theatre, there are organizations with a nightly change of play such as, for example, the D'Oyly Carte Gilbert and Sullivan Opera company, the Carl Rosa Grand Opera company, the Benson Shakespearian company, the Macdona Players of Shavian drama, or that English *Chauve-Souris*, the touring company of the Arts League of Service; but these cannot be included in the Repertory movement because, although they have *répertoires*, they are strolling players without a home, whereas the Repertory theatre is permanent and local.

Again, there are local and possibly permanent companies which may or may not be considered Repertory companies—it depends upon one's ideas about what Repertory means. Frank Vernon distinguished them from true Repertory for two reasons: they do not regularly, if ever, produce new plays; and they are compelled to choose old plays which can be relied upon to make money. The Repertory company is more anxious to help the cause of good drama than to secure a big profit.

The touring organization with a *répertoire* and the local company are leading examples of what Repertory nearly is and characteristically is not. Repertory is a movement which began in the 'nineties with the Independent Theatre without a home, continued with the Vedrenne-Barker Court Theatre season of 1904-7, and the Frohman Repertory at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1909-10, and found final expression in the four typical Repertory theatres of the provinces established at Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Birmingham.

Neither Manchester nor Birmingham was content to be of local significance: Manchester's influence was on drama and acting, Birmingham's on the theatre and decoration. Unfortunately Manchester and Glasgow ceased to exist.

The most remarkable circumstance about the present day is that the torch-bearers of dramatic idealism are amateurs. The extremely significant Repertory movement is being carried on by courageous and ambitious amateurs in all parts of the country, and they deserve all the practical help we can give them. They

may save drama when the professional allows it to die of neglect. Some of these amateur organizations are hoping to become eventually professional, in which ambition they have before them the great exemplars of Dublin and Birmingham. Both the Abbey Theatre and the Birmingham Repertory are the professional developments of amateur beginnings.

The artistic problem of early Repertory was easier than it is to-day. The principal objective of Repertory before 1914 was the popularizing of the plays of George Bernard Shaw. He bestrode the movement like a Colossus; he gave it unity, and from the Independent Theatre of the 'nineties, based upon Ibsen and Shaw, to the Court Theatre of Vedrenne and Barker, which was Shaw with occasional interruptions, and to Miss Horniman's Gaiety, where Shaw was spinal, Repertory could sing, with the Fairy Queen in *Iolanthe*:

That is the main
On which to draw—
In that we gain
A Captain Shaw!

Even of later Repertory the highest achievement is still Shaw. Though the Repertories are now bereft of the Shaw whom they made popular, his plays now forming a touring *répertoire* of their own, some of the 'difficult' Shaw plays remain at their disposal; and it is not to be gainsaid that of the three chief productions of Birmingham (*Abraham Lincoln*, *The Immortal Hour*, and *Back to Methuselah*) the last, which is Shaw's, is not the least celebrated. Liverpool also made a success with another of the plays omitted from the Macdona *répertoire*—*Heartbreak House*. The Macdona Players have themselves discovered unanticipated popularity in *Misalliance*.

The genesis of the Repertory, as has been said, was the Independent Theatre of the Archer-Grein-Shaw revolt against that Victorian theatre which was not eminent, although Tom Robertson, and later on Wilde, created diversion. Ibsen, the high god of the Independents, failed of general acclimatization in England,

and the movement might have petered out had it not been vitalized by the genius of Harley Granville-Barker. In those years from 1904 to 1907 at the Court Theatre, besides new and old plays by Shaw, the interruptions referred to above included *The Silver Box* (by John Galsworthy), *The Return of the Prodigal* (by St John Hankin), several of the Greek tragedies translated by Professor Gilbert Murray, Granville-Barker's own *The Voysey Inheritance*, and (written in collaboration with Laurence Housman) the fantasy *Prunella*.

Mr Granville-Barker is an enigmatic figure who now and then appears in the theatre world as co-translator with his wife of some play by Sierra or by the Quinteros, or as the author of the very obscure *The Secret Life*, and of a play about a modern Hamlet, *His Majesty*. But he is a very real legend of the theatre (Gordon Craig being—Gordon Craig), as the greatest of stage directors in England in that Golden Age of renascent drama. The only man who might possibly be mentioned with him, Mr Iden Payne, Miss Horniman's first director in Manchester, also enigmatically vanished, to reappear later from America, and to cope for some years with the notorious difficulties of the Shakespeare Festival season at Stratford-on-Avon. Time and again one saw actors who had no conspicuous merits transmuted into pure gold under the production of Mr Granville-Barker.

The plays, of course, had something to do with it. Read anywhere that the acting was excellent and you may be sure that a playwright and not a boggler provided the right material for acting. Under no direction do actors make bricks without straw; but Mr Granville-Barker showed how much it was possible for actors to make of *Nan*, *The Witch*, or the plays of Shaw, Granville-Barker, and Galsworthy. Nobody who saw Mr Granville-Barker in the *Hippolytus*, in *Man and Superman* and *John Bull's Other Island*, or in *The Voysey Inheritance*, can forget what an intellectually passionate thing acting can be.

Yet the Court Theatre flickered out, perhaps because the supply of masterpieces could not be continuous, perhaps because re-

removal to the larger Savoy Theatre was impolitic, or perhaps (as the late J. E. Vedrenne has said) because it was possible to earn a bare living wage only by working for eighteen hours a day.

The flame, at any rate, was dimmed; nor did the good intentions of Charles Frohman at the Duke of York's suffice to make of that Repertory theatre a fair successor to the Court. Galsworthy's *Justice* and Miss Baker's *Chains* were done, it is true, but when at the death of King Edward a general blight fell on all the theatres the end of the Frohman Repertory was not deeply deplored.

But while the Duke of York's was failing the provinces were succeeding; and the idea behind their success was that of a resident company of actors associated with plays of high artistic merit. That is to say, they cared more for drama than for commercial prosperity. Such a lofty ideal is impossible without a patron, but the theatre of the patron, from Elizabethan days onward, needs no defence. The theatre of the financier and speculator is a very different thing.

The patronage in the cases of Miss Horniman at Manchester and of Sir Barry Jackson at Birmingham is well known. Glasgow is understood to have had support from Lord Howard de Walden, but "The Scottish Playgoers, Ltd.," was ostensibly a company of public-spirited citizens, as was Liverpool, under the active chairmanship of Colonel Shute. These four Repertories, dead or alive to-day as the case may be, divide themselves into two types—viz., (1) the theatre of the patron-dictator, (2) the theatre of the enlightened citizens, which is half-way to being a municipal theatre, but which (mercifully) is not subject to the rulings of a town council committee.

Of these four Repertories, Glasgow proved to be the weakest, though it deserves praise for producing one-act plays like *The Price of Coal* and *Lonesome-like*, which have since travelled far and are immensely popular at the present day. For a period Harold Chapin was stage-director, and his delightful *The Philosopher of Butterbeggins* resulted from observation of Glasgow

life. At Glasgow too there was once to be seen a very striking example of the modesty of genius—namely, Mr Granville-Barker rehearsing his famous Tanner in *Man and Superman*, and submitting himself to the direction of Miss Madge Mackintosh, because she was the resident producer.

It has been said that success killed the Glasgow Repertory. The theatre had had its losses, naturally; then came a play by J. J. Bell based upon his famous *Wee MacGregor*, and the house was full for weeks. On one holiday, at least, the play was acted three times a day, and shortly afterwards the theatre was closed. The Glasgow shareholders, having recovered their losses, decided to take no further risks. Whether this version of the story is historically accurate, or whether it is but one more variant upon the venerable joke of the 'canny Scot,' is a matter for private judgment.

The Scottish National Players of to-day, doing plays by such authors as John Brandane and George Reston Malloch, might resent being called the heritage of the Glasgow Repertory. They are, what it was not, nationalistic in aim; but their headquarters is in Glasgow, and the old Repertory may be allowed to have had its influence.

With Mr Alfred Wareing as impresario, with the late M. R. Morand as backbone of the acting, and with players like Mary Jerrold, Irene Rooke, Hubert Harben, Milton Rosmer, Edmund Breon, and Campbell Gullan, the Glasgow Repertory was the repository of great plays, most of which the normal theatre would never have taken to Glasgow. Two productions stood out clear beyond the rest, viz., Galsworthy's *Justice* and *The Seagull* by the Russian dramatist Chekhov. In Manchester Repertory lasted longer than in Glasgow—from 1907 until about 1916, when the Gaiety was transformed into a cinema.

The zeal of Miss Horniman at the Gaiety Theatre was extraordinarily well directed by Mr B. Iden Payne. That does not mean that Miss Horniman was a cipher in her own theatre: it means that she found her ideal director, and therefore gave him

absolute control of production with voting-power equal to her own in the selection of plays. The significance of the Gaiety in its heyday may well be gauged by the number of notable actors and actresses in the company. There were Sybil Thorndike, Edith Goodall, Mona Limerick, Ada King, Irene Rooke, Lewis Casson, Esmé Percy, Charles Bibby, Herbert Lomas, Basil Dean, Whitford Kane, Milton Rosmer, and Brember Wills.

There used to exist the very false impression that the Gaiety, in spite of its name, was dreadfully devoted to grey realistic productions. It is true that musical comedy was excluded, and that plays like *David Ballard* (Charles McEvoy) and *The Feud* (Edward Garnett) appeared early in the story of Manchester Repertory. But Iden Payne's real genius for production lay in another direction. The revivals of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *The Critic*, and *Maria Marten* were all initiated by Payne in Manchester, and it was in such work as this that he found the best medium for his impish wit. The productions of the late Sir Nigel Playfair at the Hammersmith Lyric were anticipated by Payne some years ago. How judiciously he touched *Maria Marten* with a brush of happy burlesque, how joyous was his own Puff in *The Critic*, and how riotously fatuous was the apprentice of Esmé Percy in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*! Such memories as these fail to associate themselves with the idea that the Gaiety Theatre was depressing and morbid.

Iden Payne's successor, Lewis Casson, had the good fortune to produce the culminating play of Miss Horniman's theatre—*Hindle Wakes*. It was a Lancashire play by an extremely competent playwright, Stanley Houghton, but there were qualities in the drama which had more than a local appeal. It was the first long play of the Repertory tradition which reached a world-wide audience.

The popularity of *Hindle Wakes* was gratifying for several reasons. There was an idea in the minds of the wealthy men who finance plays that the audience, particularly those members who sit in the stalls, want to see plays about people who have at least

five thousand a year. That is to say, that the characters in a play must belong to the aristocracy or the upper middle classes who appear in *The Forsyte Saga*. Many writers of novels and novellettes suffer from the same delusion.

Hindle Wakes was a play about ordinary people. The heroine worked in a cotton-mill, and the hero, if we may so call him, was the son of the 'boss.' If the play had ended with the popular wedding and 'happy-ever-after' it would have been forgotten along with the thousands of sentimental stories about typists and shop-girls marrying the sons of their employers. But when Fanny refused to marry because the man was too effeminate everybody had a shock. There seemed to be a breath of the new Feminist movement in the girl's demand for a man whom she could respect. She had defied the conventions, and did not seem as penitent as she ought to have been. She had no reverence for money and material comfort. She was a rebel in the cause of independence, and she declined to believe that a temporary adventure had ruined her body and soul.

Such a play about Lancashire people clearly belonged to the age and could not be regarded as local in interest. The fact that it raised a storm of protest, that innumerable preachers denounced it from the pulpits, and that hundreds of angry letters were sent to the papers about its lack of morals, did not tend to suppress the play. The playwright or novelist who can make people sufficiently furious always gets a gratuitous advertisement.

Repertory drama is bound to be democratic, and Repertory theatres charge democratic prices for seats. They never supposed that people would pay as much to see Shaw's plays as for musical comedies, which are much more expensive to produce. A Repertory leading lady who was expected to provide her stage-clothes from a salary of eight pounds a week could not afford to act the part of a Duchess.

The low prices of seats, the low salaries paid to the actors, and the mental temper of the new authors all contributed to the idea of Repertory as the theatre for democracy. There was a pre-

dominance of plays for Puritans, with more sociology than sex in their outlook, and that is probably the real explanation of the legend of their drabness. They were not mannequins' parades!

The influence of the Manchester Repertory was more felt after its death than during its brief lifetime. It was a great nursery of players, directors, and authors. Houghton, the pioneer, died within two years of his emergence from obscurity; Harold Chapin and George Calderon were killed in the war; Gertrude Robins died, and so did Miss Darragh, the actress; Ernest Hutchinson died soon after *The Right to Strike* had seemed to establish him in London; Charles McEvoy died in 1928; and Synge's death in Ireland added point to the saying that Repertory authorship was a dangerous trade. But others of the Gaiety nursery—authors, producers, and actors—were left to carry on, and from her retirement Miss Horniman could look here and there on the English-speaking theatre and can say, "This I began."

There is a sense, for instance, in which she could say that she began the Repertory theatre with the longest life of them all—Liverpool, which has done extremely good work for years and, at the time of writing, is an outpost of the Old Vic. She could certainly say it of the Rusholme Theatre (Manchester), which, by giving first performances of plays by Arnold Bennett, H. F. Maltby, Allan Monkhouse, and James Lansdale Hodson, evaded the negative distinction of being merely a stock theatre. Unfortunately, Rusholme has been another war casualty.

Miss Horniman's work for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, is well remembered. Referring to the Irish players, Mr Dawson Byrne wrote:

Those young Irish men and women were not at this time receiving one penny for their services, but were gladly giving their all to a cause for which they laboured. To them it was a work of love, and they were exceedingly happy, feeling assured that some day they should gain the recognition that their plays and their art deserved. Their recompense did come in the person of a Miss A. E. Horniman, a lover of the theatre, who had become thoroughly acquainted and impressed

with their aims and ideals since the day she was present at the performance at Queen's Gate Hall in London. Her interview on that occasion with Mr Yeats, in which she promised to help them if they could keep going for one year, was remembered. . . . Miss Horniman obtained the lease of a little theatre in Dublin known as the Mechanics' Institute Theatre. She had it rearranged and partly rebuilt at a cost of £7,000; renamed it the Abbey Theatre, and gave it to the Irish Players free of charge for a period of six years, together with an annual subsidy which was never used. Thus the Abbey Theatre became the first endowed theatre in any English-speaking country.

That, however, is a digression. Liverpool was colonized from Manchester in 1910, and incidentally it represents Act II in the career of Mr Basil Dean, the organizer and driving spirit behind E.N.S.A. from the first days of the war. An experimental season, adventured by Mr Charles Kenyon, with Mr Dean as director, was successful at Kelly's Theatre in demonstrating that supply of Repertory could create demand. It was a six or eight weeks' shop-window show of Manchester Repertory goods, and not very long afterwards Mr Dean was director of the Repertory Theatre, Liverpool, reconstructed in the shell of an old theatre and, to quote the programme, "the property of upwards of twelve hundred Liverpool citizens. It is the first English Repertory Theatre to have been founded by these public means." The now familiar name of Mr Alec L. Rea appears among those of the early Board of Directors. "Reandean," the London management responsible for *R.U.R.*, *Loyalties*, *The Skin Game*, and *A Bill of Divorcement*, was made in Liverpool.

Now known as the Playhouse—because, it is suspected, of the clouds of dreariness which Repertory was supposed to trail—the Liverpool theatre represented the survival of the fittest. It survived by virtue of a policy frowned on by the bigots of Repertory. In the absence of a single patron with definite ideas as to what is or is not worthy of production, the Liverpool Board took the broad view that any decent play which did not empty the theatre was a Repertory play. That view gives an oppor-

tunity for masterpieces; it made Liverpool the headquarters of Lancashire comedy, such as *Mary's John*, *It's a Gamble*, *What's Bred in the Bone*; and it made the Playhouse the politest of the Repertories, because more dinner-jacket plays of the better sort have been done there than at any other Repertory. Some of the more austere believers in the Repertory faith are inclined to be critical about this; but on the other hand it might be suggested that at Manchester the plays were sometimes 'one damned kitchen after another,' and an actor might have gone through the whole season without having occasion to take his dress-clothes out of his, or his uncle's, wardrobe. The democratic note was forced a little too insistently.

When the late Sir Gerald du Maurier styled himself a "dinner-jacket comedian" he was not implying that he was not a good actor. A dinner-jacket play can be a good play even if it is a Mayfair entertainment; and a Citizens' Theatre must be what the theatre of a wealthy patron need not be—Everyman's Repertory. The case against Liverpool was bigotry: it did perform dinner-jacket plays. Its director, Mr William Armstrong, saved it from threatened extinction by the long run of a Lancashire comedy *Hobson's Choice*, and then cultivated popularity by a judicious mingling of plays by A. A. Milne, Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Bernard Shaw, Harold Brighouse, and Sir James Barrie. The Repertory ship was steered on a common-sense course avoiding the Scylla of the fastidious highbrow and the Charybdis of the lowbrow. Thus Liverpool had a chance of seeing plays, English and foreign, which are not embraced by a touring system.

As to the Repertory's influence outside the city of Liverpool, the three big names are those of Mr Basil Dean, Mr Alex Rea, and George Harris, the brilliant designer who died some years ago. But it is striking to find on a programme for 1912 that Miss Estelle Winwood, who is better known now in America than in England, Ronald Squire, J. H. Roberts, Dion Titheradge, Laurence Hanray, and John Garside were all members of a cast

of ten under Mr Basil Dean. A fact like this gives one food for thought. Repertory drama has a tremendous struggle to exist, but it is the main inspiration of young dramatists who are writing first-rate plays, and it supplies the world with actors, producers, and designers. When one realizes the type of play which becomes a great commercial success, and then thinks of the gallant Repertory movement which has to fight with all its strength merely to exist, one cannot help recalling the sad remark of Ruskin, "I do not wonder at what men suffer, but I do wonder at what they lose."

Now for the fortunate city, Birmingham. When Frank Vernon spoke of "Queen Horniman" he did not exclude the possibility of there being a Repertory king. The full story of the Birmingham Repertory has been told in a published book. It is necessary to recall only a few of its achievements. Undoubtedly there has been too much 'pothor' about Sir Barry Jackson's productions of Shakespeare in modern dress, and about his failure with *The Farmer's Wife* and *Yellow Sands* in America. Mr Eden Phillpotts' plays, if highly popular and profitable in England, are by-products of the movement; and in any case New York gave a fervent welcome to *Abraham Lincoln*, which Sir Barry Jackson was the first to produce, and its reception of Drinkwater's *Bird in Hand* compensated for its rejection of Mr Phillpotts.

Beginning, after its amateur apprenticeship, rather later than Liverpool, the Birmingham Repertory was born when the anti-naturalistic revolt was becoming conscious of itself. The question "What next?" was being put, and nobody quite knew the answer, which, it is evident from a survey of its programmes, Birmingham sought to find open-mindedly with a bias away from the 'fourth wall' theory and towards impressionism and expressionism. Sir Barry Jackson made his theatre in Shakespeare's Warwickshire, the research laboratory of the stage, and associated with his own emancipated mind in those early years was the mind of John Drinkwater, who, it is signifi-

cant to observe, was a poet before he was a playwright and producer.

A common experience of Repertory management is that audiences prefer an old play with a reputation to a new one with a reputation still to make—an unenterprising habit which puts drastic limit to productivity. Birmingham's was a forward policy, and the audiences made some sad failures, as did the Manchester audiences before them. At one time, we are told, Sir Barry Jackson was so tired of Birmingham's indifference that he seriously thought of transferring his activities to London. Happily, this has not happened. Birmingham produces what is reproduced in London. Repertory is Repertory still.

One is apt, all the same, to think of Sir Barry Jackson not as a man who runs a Repertory in Birmingham, but as one of our conquerors in London. His Repertory, more than any other, has had a centrifugal motion; and its influence on the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, was memorable. Financially the evidence is obvious enough: it was out of the profits of *Abraham Lincoln* that Sir Nigel Playfair securely established himself at the Lyric; and one cannot help remarking how the simplified settings which enabled one scene of *Lincoln* to follow another without much pause seem to supply the model for the panel staging which was habitually used in Hammersmith from *The Beggar's Opera* onward.

But the Birmingham Repertory need make no doubtful claims. It gave London *Back to Methuselah* and *The Immortal Hour*, and the word 'gave' in these examples is not used politely, but literally. Such productions are the gifts of a patron who also, when he brings potential successes like *The Farmer's Wife* and *Bird in Hand*, can support the cost of 'nursing' them into real successes. And he can give stage decorators their opportunities.

Such is a brief epitome of the Repertory movement which, it must be insisted, moves progressively. Even where losses have been recorded, as at Glasgow and Manchester, the battle is not lost. In Glasgow there are the Scottish National Players, and in

Manchester the Unnamed Society, which is amateur with a strong leaning towards Impressionism and towards the plays of Mr Sladen-Smith and Mr Stanley Jast, and which leads to the statement that among the amateurs also there is a Repertory Movement.

The normal amateur is eager to perform plays which have achieved success in the professional theatre, either in this country or in America; but there is also the amateur who prefers plays of the Repertory kind, and occasionally he is even more ambitious than the Repertory. No Repertory has attempted *Peer Gynt*, but, following the Old Vic, at least two amateur companies (in Beckenham and Leeds) have done so. Moreover, the amateurs are producing new plays, from those of Mr Philip Johnson, Mr J. R. Gregson, and Mr John Brandane, and of the Manchester Unnamed Society's authors, to those written in a tiny village like Burley-in-Wharfedale and performed in a barn. The leaven is extraordinarily active in the lump: it is curiously active in the Yorkshire lump.

Wherever the theatre exists there is not one theatre but two; they overlap, no doubt, but at their extremes they are distinct. There are the theatres of the 'night out' and the Repertories. The theatre which exists merely to provide people with an entertainment has a cause which ought not to need defence even against the highbrow: it is identified with the great work of cheering us all up.

But it must not be inferred that the Repertory theatre is identified with the work of depressing us. That is one of the great delusions of the present day. There is not the slightest foundation for the idea that intelligent drama must of necessity be dull or disenchanting.

After all, it is character which makes drama; but the theatre of the 'night out' is wont to be satisfied with caricature instead of character; and dancing, low comedians, and chocolate-box stage decoration are poor substitutes for drama.

Repertory has been described as a state of mind: a faith,

difficult to define, but widely held. What is a Repertory company but a stock company with a sense of pride? Glasgow, Leeds, Hull, Bradford, Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, and other provincial cities have done good work in the past and will do so again. The re-opening of the Theatre Royal at Bristol was an encouraging event. In London itself the Old Vic, bombed out from its former home, established itself in 1944 at the New Theatre and took up afresh the work in classical repertory which has for years made it our nearest approach to a national theatre. As lovers of drama we console ourselves with the achievements of Repertory everywhere.

CHAPTER XVI

SALVATION BY AMATEURS

DURING recent years we have listened to continuous lamentations about the state of drama in this country. The mildest critics admit that the theatre is "in a bad way" and seems to be getting steadily worse, while the more emphatic critics assert that drama is dead beyond all hope of a resurrection!

There are half a dozen explanations of the 'slump' in the theatre in the period between the two wars. One of the commonest attributes the misfortune to the excessively high rents of theatres. The original owners let the theatre to a speculator, who sublets it to another (at a higher price, naturally), who again sublets it, and in some cases the process has been repeated five or six times. The final rent is colossal, and unless a fortune is to be gaily lost it is necessary to choose a play which will fill the 'house' at every performance.

The theatre has fallen into the hands of business men, war-time profiteers, some of them, who neither know nor care about the quality of the drama to be produced. Taking a theatre or financing a play has become merely a business gamble, like bookmaking. They know, or imagine they know, the popular tastes, and they give the public what they think it wants—a spectacular show, sumptuous scenes, 'catchy tunes,' pretty frocks, a beauty chorus, the humour of low comedians, and a sentimentally happy ending. Such a production is not likely to have the qualities of great drama. The cabaret scene is more important than good acting. The imaginative play has no chance at all.

What happens in the majority of cases is that a man is sent to New York to find a play which is succeeding well over there. It is often a translation or adaptation of a French light comedy, or perhaps a slick, melodramatic crook play. If it is a stunning

success in America it is assumed, frequently without any justification, that it will do well in England.

Our English playwrights, of whom we have scores, are treated with unpatriotic neglect. It is so much easier for a theatrical mandarin to take a trip to New York than to read through a couple of dozen plays! In many cases he is incompetent to recognize a good play in print: he must see it actually on the stage before he can pass judgment. He is the type of man who 'backs favourites' and is afraid to stake on the unknown 'outsider.'

There are at the present time scores of fine plays waiting for the chance which never seems to come.

Years ago the actor-manager was an obstacle. He wanted to find a play in which he could take a really impressive part, and the rest of the play did not matter.¹ The demand influences the supply, of course, and playwrights had to write plays with an actor-manager part in strong emphasis. It was rather like running a football team with a brilliant centre-forward and ten other undistinguished players.

The 'star' system has similar defects. The celebrated actress who can attract the crowds and delight the people in the box-office has the right to say whether she will or will not play in a given drama. In many cases she has been 'bought' by financial speculators, and the type of play to be accepted for production depends upon the part allocated to her, and not upon the dramatic qualities of the play as a whole. The play which requires team-work for its success is usually found in a Repertory theatre.

The competition of the silent film shortly after the last war filled many lovers of drama with alarm. They prophesied the end of 'legitimate' drama in the immediate future. The picture-palaces could remain open and give continuous performances from noon till midnight; the seats were comfortable and cheap; and one could walk in any time.

The rapid improvement of the technique of the 'movie' and the invention of the 'talkie' have made the prophets even more

¹ Mr Gordon Craig argues the case in his book *Henry Irving*.

certain that legitimate drama is as good as dead. In fact, Edgar Wallace, whose plays have had enormous success, once bluntly declared that the playwrights of the future would write directly for the films, and the actors and actresses of the old stage would betake themselves to Hollywood and other places where the film industry is in full swing.

Nevertheless, in spite of the competition of the films, the huge rents of the theatres, the speculating by business men, the 'star' system, and the vast amount of second- and third-rate drama which is being performed to-day, the cause of good drama is far from being dead.

Three circumstances, at any rate, give us reason to rejoice. The first is the astonishing revival of good drama in our own time. The eighteenth century and the greater part of the nineteenth century were disappointing. The dearth of dramatists of quality was alarming, and the theatre in England was never at a lower ebb. But during the last half-century British drama has had a renaissance comparable to that of Elizabethan days. The list of first-class dramatists alive to-day is tremendously reassuring.

The second is the excellent work which is being done by the Repertory theatres of Great Britain and the Little Theatres in America. The big theatres are in the hands of the gamblers, but the cause of true drama is kept alive in the small theatres in all parts of the country. Lovers of drama will support the Repertory movement for all they are worth.

The third is the phenomenal popularity of amateur acting. There have never been so many amateur companies in existence. The British Drama League Festivals reveal to us something of the volume of work which is being done, and much of it is excellent. Youth leaders all over the country are busily forming dramatic groups of young people in their teens. Their numbers run into thousands.

The Village Drama Society has been doing a great work throughout the country. There are county committees, each

looking after its own needs and urging forward the good work. In one year over seven thousand different villages asked for help in securing costumes, printed plays, and the expert advice of producers.

Wales, for example, has for generations been opposed to the stage and all its associations, but during the past few years the keen interest of Wales in drama has surprised everybody. The Welsh temperament is instinctively dramatic, and the newly discovered enthusiasm for plays is sweeping everything before it. For the first time in history we are having a Welsh drama, and the movement may go far to redeem the hostility and neglect of the past. Two Welsh playwrights who have scored great successes in the West End and whose names are familiar to all playgoers are Emlyn Williams and Ivor Novello. Emlyn Williams has given us straight plays like *Night Must Fall* and *The Corn is Green*, which are deeply moving; Ivor Novello has given us a series of spectacular musical plays like *Glamorous Night*, *Crest of the Wave*, and *The Dancing Years*, but there is nothing distinctively Welsh in them. They might be described as typical Drury Lane 'shows.' Both these playwrights are also actors and producers.

The Board of Education some years ago appointed a special committee to investigate the place of drama in adult education, and the results were surprising. They discovered that there were more than 700 societies affiliated to the British Drama League, more than 150 branches of the Village Drama Society, while hundreds of other dramatic groups were actively working in connexion with the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the National Adult School Union, the Y.M.C.A., the Catholic Play Society, the Independent Labour Party, and others. Mr Harley Granville-Barker said:

The fact that an increasing number of grown-up people find distraction for the winter evenings in amateur theatricals would be little more worth worrying about than the prevalence of Bridge or Mah-Jongg. But the striking thing about the present revival of interest in

the drama—as apart from interest in the professional theatre—is the liking of plays for their own sake and therefore, more often than not, the liking of good plays. I suspect that the amateur clubs of my youth still go on, and perform out-of-date West End successes, in which feeble imitations are given of the popular favourites who first played them. But the strength of the movement lies in a variety of organizations of very recent origin, quite unrelated to these or the taste they show. I do not think they pay very much regard to the fashions in professional drama either. I believe—though it may be because I wish to believe—that here is a genuine artistic up-growth and an endeavour not merely after self-expression, but after the far more complex co-operation that drama provides. Here, in fact, is a genuine and creative interest in a highly organic art.¹

This is enormously encouraging to all who have the interest of drama at heart. Amateur drama is doing a much greater work than one suspects, and its influence grows wider and deeper every year. Amateur productions are reported only in local newspapers, and the cumulative effect is apt to be missed.

According to the Report of the Committee, “the character of play produced by the better type of dramatic society is very high, much higher, in fact, than that prevailing in the commercial theatre either in London or the provinces.”

One remarkable feature is the popularity of the Greek play. We find the Birmingham Playgoers giving the *Electra*; the Regent Street Polytechnic *The Trojan Women*; the Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich the *Hippolytus*, *Electra*, and *Alcestis*; the Folk House, Bristol, the Mary Ward Settlement, and the Sheffield Educational Settlement the *Andromache*. The Bradford Civic Theatre has been doing excellent work throughout the war. There are many similar instances. Mr Sharwood Smith says that the poor people in the neighbourhood of his school would not miss a Greek play for worlds.

Shakespeare and Sheridan are consistently successful, and Sir Barry Jackson advocates the claim of plays which are less often

¹ *The Drama in Adult Education* (H.M. Stationery Office).

seen, such as *Ralph Roister Doister*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, and the old *Ballad Operas*. The amateur societies represent, he contends, an admirable field for experiment.

"We are impressed also," the Report runs,

by the great popularity among these societies of the imaginative plays of Dunsany, Synge, Lady Gregory, Yeats and the Irish School of dramatists, and the English poetical drama of Masfield, Drinkwater, Lascelles Abercrombie, and Gordon Bottomley. It is a matter for satisfaction that owing to amateur effort these plays have been witnessed by thousands who would not otherwise have had the opportunity of seeing them.

One might go on quoting for many pages, but it must suffice to say that the amateurs are doing work of incalculable importance all over the country. The Jeremiahs who write obituary notices about the death of drama in the country are misled by the failures in the West End.

Unfortunately, it has to be admitted that the tendency of most plays is aristocratic—that is to say, they are too often highly sophisticated plays calculated to appeal to the class of playgoer who is willing to pay fourteen-and-six for a stall. The West End theatre really aims at a twentieth-century version of a Restoration comedy, both as regards content and as regards the mental attitude of the audience. Such a play deals with wealthy people, and is based upon intrigue, flavoured with a spice of 'naughtiness' and irresponsible wit.

The democratic theatre is not popular with the fashionably dressed playgoer, and we must look to the amateurs for its salvation.

The amateurs must also be thanked for saving the one-act play from extinction. In the professional theatre the one-act play is rarely more than a curtain-raiser, and is only used as a sort of make-weight when the main play is too short. It helps to 'kill' the time until the late diners arrive. It is not treated with any seriousness.

The truth is that the one-act play is an art-form, complete in itself, and frequently has great beauty. Only a Philistine would dream of reckoning drama by its length—it would be just as fair to calculate the value of a painting by the square foot. We all realize that a short story is not a condensed novel, any more than a sonnet is a condensed ode. A short story, within its limitations, can be a perfect thing, satisfying to the imagination. Some of the short stories of Kipling, O. Henry, and Maupassant are as excellent as human genius can conceive.

The one-act play is similarly a 'finished' work of art, and lovers of drama cannot afford to neglect it. Little plays like *Riders to the Sea*, *The Dumb and the Blind*, *Followers*, *The Glittering Gate*, *The Twelve-pound Look*, *O'Flaherty*, *V.C.*, *The Dear Departed*, and *Campbell of Kilmohr* are too precious to lose, and if the commercial theatre cares nothing for them we must look to the Little Theatres.

There are two kinds of amateurs, of course, as there are two kinds of professionals. There are those who want to amuse and to be amused, and there are those (thank Heaven!) who want to produce good plays. Annual competitions are good in that they stimulate effort and provide a definite objective; but the danger of dramatic competitions is that they tend towards unambitious work. A competing 'club' or 'society' is always tempted to select a safe, well-made, mechanically perfect type of play which is entirely within their powers rather than a more ambitious and imaginative play which will make bigger demands upon the actors and audiences alike. When marks are given for choice of play amateurs will be less anxious to play for safety.

Mr Gordon Bottomley and Mrs Penelope Wheeler, adjudicators at the Village Drama Festivals, reported that the amateurs who approached a play with fresh minds and relied upon their own imaginations did much better work than those who were 'more sophisticated'. If an actor has seen his part acted by a professional he will consciously or unconsciously tend to imitate the style and mannerisms of the theatre, and there are many

stage tricks of the professional which are entirely out of place on the amateur stage.

The village actor must speak as clearly and expressively as he can, but sincerity is his supreme qualification. The moment he becomes affected in speech and 'professional' in manner he ceases to function as an interpreter of his part; he will probably, to speak in the vernacular, bust up the whole show.

A producer who has an independent spirit may go to see professional work as often as he likes, and he will doubtless pick up little points which will be invaluable in his own work; but the producer who is too ready to ape the professionals should keep away from them altogether. A village company which tackles a play without any predilections derived from other players has a chance at least of doing sound work.

One village club some years ago produced the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* in an exceedingly unorthodox way. The Duke from beginning to end treated the trial as a huge joke. Shylock's demand for a pound of Antonio's flesh made him laugh uproariously, and when Portia appeared and turned the tables on the Jew the Duke grew crimson in the face and roared with delight! No professional company has ever imagined such an interpretation, and yet one can easily believe that the Elizabethans might have treated the scene as farcical, and the whole idea of the trial, seriously considered, is extremely preposterous.

Mr Nugent Monck writes:

I ask of my actors sincerity. I require them to study the play with a view to finding out what the author meant and try to instil in them the capacity to reproduce the emotion which they first felt when reading the part. I never allow anyone to express an emotion which he has not felt.

The sincerity of an amateur performance often atones in a great measure for deficiencies in technique and finish. In a note on *The Art of Rehearsal*, written by Mr Bernard Shaw, there is a passage bearing on this point which may be quoted.

The beginning and end of the business from the author's point of view is the art of making the audience believe that real things are happening to real people. But the actor, male or female, may want the audience to believe that it is witnessing a magnificent display of acting by a great artist; and when the attempt to do this fails the effect is disastrous, because then there is neither play nor great acting: the play is not credible nor the acting fascinating. . . . That is why comparatively humble actors, who do not dare to think they can succeed apart from the play, often give much better representations than star casts.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that we must change our ideas about the acting of amateurs. If an amateur does a thing for the love of it, in contrast to the professional, who does it for a salary, there are fifty reasons why he should succeed in giving a moving and sincere performance. He may lack the technique of the professional, it is true, but he will not be in danger of making a plain man—a farmer or a commercial traveller, for example—behave like an excessively theatrical actor. Charles Lamb made an admirable point when he contrasted the actor who behaved on the stage as he did when he was off it with another who behaved off the stage as he did when he was on: the latter was always acting and strutted down the street as if he were treading the boards! No amateur does that sort of thing without hearing about it from friend and foe alike.

It must not be thought, however, that an amateur behaves on the stage exactly as he does in daily life. He may be acting in Shakespeare, but he does not talk Elizabethan verse in his home; nor does he talk the kind of prose used by the characters in an eighteenth-century play by Sheridan or Goldsmith. Even in a modern play about middle-class people he cannot be his usual everyday self. In our ordinary daily life we are all in the habit of underacting our parts. We continually repress and suppress our emotions.

One of the great joys of acting in a good drama is that for once in a while we can release our imprisoned 'selves' and express all that we feel. The modern play gives the illusion of reality, but

it does not give literal or photographic reality, for then there would be no drama. There is an analogy in stage scenery when a few daubs of paint suggest trees. Seen from close at hand the colours are grotesquely overdone, but from the auditorium they seem natural enough. On the other hand, real foliage, real grass, real water, on the stage do not look 'real' at all.

The same argument applies to the make-up which an actor must use. Without the make-up his face would appear flat and expressionless from the distance, and in a similar way the dialogue of the stage has to be retouched and made dramatic to give the impression of reality to the audience.

All people who have had experience in amateur theatricals agree that the producer should have absolute power. A small committee may be chosen to 'test' the capabilities of the various actors for purposes of casting, but the producer should always be present at auditions and should have the right to veto any choice by the committee of which he does not approve.

The producer is frequently a person who has had professional experience of stage-work. He must have an artistic eye for effect—groupings, colours, scenery. He must have enormous tact in handling men and women with firmness and courtesy. He must be able to inspire enthusiasm in his subjects. He must be a born Commander-in-Chief.

The stage-manager will be his right-hand man and will help with rehearsals. It often happens that two parts of a play are being rehearsed simultaneously, and in that case the producer will take charge of one, while the stage-manager superintends the other. He is responsible for the stage and the scenery, and has control over the stage-carpenters, scene-shifters, electricians, and others.

The property-man is responsible for everything needed by the actors excluding scenery and costumes. He will look after the pistols, letters, the butler's tray, telegrams, and so forth. It will be part of his job to make sure that nothing of vital importance is missing at the beginning of a scene.

The hiring of the hall, the printing of posters and tickets, and the whole financial side of production should be left to the business manager. If the play is a modern one he will have to pay the fees due to the author and to secure the written permission for its performance.

Amateurs will naturally eliminate all unnecessary work. If the performers obtain their own costumes, for example, there will be no need for a wardrobe master or mistress. The property-man may be one of the actors, just as the producer may be another; but there must be a competent person not included in the cast to superintend such essential items as the raising and dropping of the curtain and the readiness of every actor to enter at the exact moment when he is due.

The greatest troubles in amateur theatricals arise from personal friction or jealousy between the actors, and from allowing one person to undertake too many jobs. The producer is the hardest worker, but if he knows his business he will distribute the more or less mechanical duties among his 'team' and concentrate on the task of 'licking the play into shape.'

CHAPTER XVII

A LIST OF PLAYS

IN Chapters XIII and XIV an account was given of a few of the modern dramatists who have done, and in many cases are still doing, good imaginative work for the theatre. There are many conspicuous omissions, however, and it is the purpose of the present chapter to fill in a few of the innumerable gaps that have been necessarily left.

To begin with, there are dramatists in every country of Europe, and if it is not possible to see the plays performed it is nearly always possible to read them in translation. Here, again, one can mention only a small fraction of the playwrights who count.

In Belgium, for example, there are the plays of Vanzype, Verhaeren, Picard, Maubel, and a dozen more; but the outstanding name is that of Maurice Maeterlinck. His fantasy, *The Blue Bird*, is international and may be seen on the stage quite frequently, but his other plays (*Monna Vanna*, *Pelleas and Melisande*, etc.) may be bought or borrowed from a public library.

The most important name in Czechoslovakia is that of the Čapek brothers, whose *R.U.R.* (which has popularized the word 'Robot' in English), *The Insect Play*, and *The Makropoulos Secret* made something of a sensation among playgoers.

Russia has produced many dramatists, and the Art Theatre of Moscow has come to be regarded as a pioneer of new movements. The names of Tolstoy, Gorky, Gogol, and Sologub are best known to novel-readers, but all these men are playwrights who have done good work. Far more important to the youthful playgoer is the work of Chekhov, whose *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *The Three Sisters* are all excellent.

Hungary is best represented by Ferenc Molnar, who has

written *The Swan*, *Liliom*, *The Play's the Thing*, and a large number of one-act plays.

Italy has a long list of playwrights, but the most famous names in this country are probably Pirandello and D'Annunzio; the former for a psychological drama, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and the latter for his tragedies like *Gioconda*, *The Dead City*, and *The Honeysuckle*.

Spain has always been prolific in drama, but at the present time she is best known for the work of Benavente, Sierra, and Joaquin and Serafin Quintero, whose *Fortunato*, *The Lady From Alfaceque*, and *A Hundred Years Old* have been translated by Mr and Mrs Granville-Barker.

Germany has given us scores of dramatists, including Hauptmann, Sudermann, Dreyer, Wedekind, Zweig, Kaiser, Gott, and Toller. All these are comparatively recent and belong to the new movements of drama. The classic names of Goethe (the author of *Faust*), Schiller, Heine, etc., may be taken for granted.

Similarly with France. Everybody has heard of Racine, Corneille, Molière, Dumas, Hugo, Scribe, Sardou, Pailleron, Becque, Daudet, Augier, Lemaitre, Bourget, Brioux, and many more; but the newer movements in drama are associated with names like Sacha Guitry, Bernstein, Bataille, Bisson, Lenormand, Valéry, Renard, Jean-Jacques Bernard, and de Flers. Rostand deliberately kept himself aloof from Realism and belongs to the new French romance. One should not miss a chance of seeing *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *L'Aiglon*, *The Romantics*, and *Chanticleer*.

Irish playwrights have been mentioned before, but there are several names which may have been missed. Lord Dunsany has given us a full-length fantastic comedy called *If*, but his one-act plays are extraordinarily fine work. Lady Gregory is also best known by her one-act plays. They are usually comedies like *The Workhouse Ward*, *Spreading the News*, or *The Rising of the Moon*, but occasionally she ventured into tragedy as in *The Gaol Gate* and some of her folk-history plays. W. B. Yeats, the poet, was the literary genius of the Irish National Theatre. His best

plays are *The Countess Cathleen*, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, *The Shadowy Waters*, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and *Deirdre*. J. M. Synge has been referred to elsewhere.

American drama increases in significance every year. The list of twentieth-century playwrights is considerable, but the names of the chief contributions to modern drama have been given elsewhere (Chapter XIV).

And now, with considerable misgiving and trepidation, I propose to mention some other plays which the reader would do well to see for himself. I am omitting the classics of Greece and Rome, the medieval plays of England, the works of the Elizabethans, of the Restoration period, of the eighteenth and the greater part of the nineteenth century. One must see Shakespeare, of course, as one must see Congreve and Wycherley, Sheridan and Goldsmith: all playwrights who have stood the test of time.

Prunella, by H. Granville-Barker and Laurence Housman.

The Voyage Inheritance, by H. Granville-Barker.

Little Plays of St Francis
Victoria Regina } by Laurence Housman.

Hindle Wakes, by Stanley Houghton.

Berkeley Square, by J. L. Balderston and J. C. Squire.

Nan

Pompey the Great } by John Masefield.

Philip the King

The Conquering Hero
Mary Broome } by Allan Monkhouse.

The Rebellion of Youth, by J. C. McMullen.

At Mrs Beam's, by C. K. Munro.

The Lost Leader

The White-headed Boy } by Lennox Robinson.

Chains, by Elizabeth Baker.

The Grain of Mustard Seed, by H. M. Harwood.

King Lear's Wife
Gruach } by Gordon Bottomley.

The Barretts of Wimpole Street, by Rudolf Besier.

- The Likes of Her*, by Charles McEvoy.
The Cassilis Engagement
The Return of the Prodigal } by St John Hankin.
Cousin Kate
The Mollusc } by H. H. Davies.
The Walls of Jericho, by Alfred Sutro.
Paola and Francesca, by Stephen Phillips.
Hassan, by James Elroy Flecker.
Housemaster, by Ian Hay.
T^r Marsdens, by J. R. Gregson.
Diminutive Dramas, by Maurice Baring.
Outward Bound, by Sutton Vane.
Change, by J. O. Francis.
The Glen is Mine, by John Brandane.
The Venetian
The Rose without a Thorn } by Clifford Bax.
Musical Chairs, by Ronald Mackenzie.
Strange Orchestra, by Rodney Ackland.
Murder in the Cathedral, by T. S. Eliot.
Richard of Bordeaux, by Gordon Daviot.
Rhondda Roundabout, by Jack Jones.
Love on the Dole, by Walter Greenwood and Ronald Gow.
And So to Bed, by J. B. Fagan.
Mrs Moonlight, by Benn Levy.
Charles and Mary, by Joan Temple.
The Man with a Load of Mischief, by Ashley Dukes.
Magic, by G. K. Chesterton.
The Farmer's Wife
Yellow Sands } by Eden Phillpotts.
Night Must Fall
The Corn is Green } by Emlyn Williams.
The World of Light, by Aldous Huxley.
The Lady with a Lamp, by Reginald Berkeley.

The reader who desires to see a 'crook' play might begin at the top by seeing *On the Spot*, by Edgar Wallace (there was a vogue for such plays in 1928-30), and for good specimens of modern farce it is difficult to beat *Tons of Money*, by Will Evans

and Valentine, or the Aldwych plays of Ben Travers, like *Rookery Nook*, *The Cuckoo in the Nest*, and others.

In addition to the above it may be taken for granted that the plays of the authors specially dealt with in Chapters XIII and XIV are particularly commended—viz., those of Sir James Barrie, John Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw, Sir Arthur Pinero, Sean O'Casey, A. A. Milne, W. Somerset Maugham, Frederick Lonsdale, Noel Coward, St John Ervine, John Drinkwater, Harold Brighouse, Arnold Bennett, Monckton Hoffe, John Van Druten, J. B. Priestley, James Bridie, and Miss Clemence Dane.

CHAPTER XVIII

PLAYS AND PLAYWRITING

BEFORE passing on to the study of the theatre of the present day it will perhaps be advisable to attempt some sort of classification of the many types of plays which dramatists have created. Drama never stands still for long, for as soon as a particular kind of play has established itself the younger playwrights are in revolt against it, and the daring experimentalist of one decade finds himself quite orthodox in the next and may be dismissed as obsolete a few years later. New forms continually appear, have their day, and disappear either for a time or for ever.

Thus, beginning with the mystery and miracle plays, we move on to the morality, the interlude, the Court play, the masque, the chronicle play, the romantic comedy, the tragedy, the tragi-comedy, the heroic tragedy, the pastoral, the comedy of manners, the melodrama, and countless other variations, until we come to the vogue of the well-made play, the play of ideas, the thesis play, realism, naturalism, symbolism, expressionism, futurism, and even more advanced forms for which no name has yet been invented.

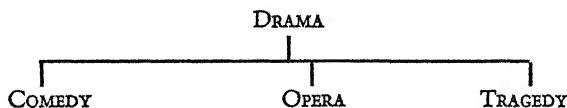
Nor must we forget the lighter types of drama—the farce, the burlesque, the musical comedy, the pantomime, the revue—some of which are exceedingly old and historically interesting.

Moreover, it is always possible that a type of drama thought to be extinct will reappear in the twentieth century. Drinkwater revived the chronicle play in *Abraham Lincoln* and Robert E. Lee; Harold Brighouse gave us a morality play in *The Apple Tree*; Miss Cicely Hamilton has written a one-act nativity play, in *The Child in Flanders*; Marc Connelly has revived the mystery play in *Green Pastures*; Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblock reintroduced the comedy of manners in *Milestones*; and they

Elizabethan masque may be regarded as the progenitor of the modern expressionist drama. We have to remember, too, that there are a number of plays which will not fit into any category, while others—like costume plays—may be placed in several.

Another difficulty in classifying plays is due to the fact that the original words have lost their former meaning. The word 'drama' comes from the Greek, and signifies 'action'; but there are plenty of modern plays (like *The Apple Cart*, by Bernard Shaw) in which there is practically no action at all. The newspapers, aided and abetted by the film trade, have made the word 'dramatic' synonymous with 'exciting' or 'thrilling'; but a drawing-room comedy by A. A. Milne is legitimately called 'drama,' although the sensational element may be entirely missing. Similarly, 'melodrama' suggests 'action plus music,' but the music has been lost, and the real drama with music is called grand opera.

In the old books on drama the subject was divided into three groups, thus:



But an opera must be either comedy or tragedy. *Carmen*, *Maritana*, and *The Mastersingers* are undoubtedly comedies, just as *Aida*, *Madam Butterfly*, and *Tristan and Isolde* are undoubtedly tragedies.

We are left with the dual division of comedy and tragedy. There is a popular notion, partly attributable to the films, that a comedy is a play which is intensely amusing throughout. The truth is that a comedy may be rather serious, just as a tragedy may be rather humorous at times. One thinks of *The Winter's Tale*, a sad play on the whole, but held to be a comedy because it ends happily. It is true that the lost child is discovered, and

the banished queen restored, but the play approaches the tragic, and until the end is approaching it is uncertain whether it will prove to be comedy or tragedy. On the other hand, there are comic scenes in most tragedies—*e.g.*, the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet*, or the drunken porter scene in *Macbeth*.

Comedy and tragedy are no longer regarded as opposites. There is often only a hair's-breadth between the two, and the deciding factor is revealed in the ending. According to the Greeks, tragedy "purges the soul by pity and terror," while comedy "chastens morals by reason and ridicule." According to modern ideas, a play must be considered a comedy if it leaves the audience with a feeling of satisfaction—an assurance that virtue is rewarded in the end, and that the foundations of the universe are justice and mercy. The play that makes one feel that villainy is triumphant, or that the world is run by blind chance, is essentially a tragedy. Thomas Hardy's summing-up of tragedy as "the Worthy encompassed by the Inevitable" is admirable, and it certainly finds confirmation in his tragic novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (which has been rewritten as a play) and *Jude the Obscure*.

Accepting the twofold classification for the moment, we perceive that the 'pure comedy' may develop into 'farce,' 'burlesque,' 'pantomime,' 'vaudeville,' while the 'pure tragedy' may degenerate into Grand Guignol plays, melodrama, and 'shockers.' Comedy proper may be light (as in the comedy of manners or the drawing-room play), or more serious (as in the thesis play, the problem play, the chronicle play, or the satirical play which happens to have an optimistic ending). Similarly, grand opera may be comedy or tragedy; but the former may become still lighter in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and in musical comedies (*The Quaker Girl*, *The Bohemian Girl*, *The Belle of New York*, *The Geisha*, *The Country Girl*, *The Vagabond King*, *Rose Marie*, etc.), in which the dialogue is spoken instead of sung. The Christmas pantomime, founded upon a fairy-tale, is very much like a musical comedy. The fashionable revue is

not a play at all, but a series of music-hall 'turns' which have little or no relation to one another.

Again, comedy and tragedy may overlap in the mongrel¹ tragi-comedy, melodrama, and many of the romantic plays of the early nineteenth century.

We badly need a name for the exciting type of play which is generally miscalled a drama. We could then divide plays into the three classes—comedies, dramas, and tragedies—bearing in mind that they may be musical or otherwise. The comedy could then be divided into (a) serious, (b) sentimental, (c) romantic, (d) fantastic, (e) burlesque or farce, (f) pantomime. The drama could be made to include the melodrama, the 'crook' play, the problem play, the heroic play, and the 'horror.' The tragedy would be written in prose or verse, and might be spoken or sung.

Historical and period or costume plays would appear in all groups. Thus Shakespeare's *Henry IV* would be regarded as a comedy, *Henry V* as a drama, and *Julius Cæsar*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III* as tragedies.

The Taming of the Shrew might be regarded as comedy with strong leaning towards farce, *The Merchant of Venice* would be comedy with leanings towards drama, while *The Tempest* would be a comedy which verges upon fantasy.

A well-known American critic has protested against the popular notion that drama is merely a branch of literature. He points out that half a dozen different arts contribute to a stage production—music, dancing, painting, costuming, lighting, and elocution—and that the playwright is by no means the supremely important artist of the stage. He thinks that drama suffers from too much of the literary element.

One sees what he means, of course, but the good dramatist is never inordinately bookish. He is intensely interested in men and women. His inspiration, like that of the poet or novelist, comes from life itself. Still, a man may spend years at sea as

¹ The word applied to them by Sir Philip Sidney.

Conrad and Masfield did, or in roaming about the queer corners of the world, as did Stevenson and W. H. Davies, but unless he possesses an unusual genius for translating his impressions into words he will never become a poet, a novelist, or a playwright of any consequence.

It is still true that plays survive only when they have definite literary quality, and it is precisely this literary quality which some of the ultra-modern Futurists are apt to despise. This insistence upon the importance of words does not exclude from our consideration the lighter side of the theatre, although quite frequently, and as an instrument for emotion, the lighter side may have nothing to do with literature. In fact, in some cases, like miming and marionette shows, no word may be spoken at all.

The supreme example of wordless drama is the Russian Ballet, which makes use of music, dancing, costume, scenery, lighting—all the resources of the theatre except dialogue—to produce an art-form which is unique and of a satisfying beauty.

There are, again, many plays written deliberately for the 'productionist' theatre—that is, plays in which stage effects are of more importance than the dialogue. Their most serious manifestation is in the expressionist drama which originated in Middle Europe, in the works of Georg Kaiser, Fritz von Unruh, Ernst Toller, and the brothers Čapek.

With simple people the eye transmits to the understanding brain more easily than the ear. The world popularity of the silent film can be accounted for by the fact that people will look when they will not listen. Incidentally, the strongest argument against the 'talkie' is not the limitations of spoken language but that it relies less and less upon the real art of the silent film, which is essentially pictorial. The 'talkie' can no longer be regarded as an experiment: an interruption to the development of the silent film as the art of (literally) moving pictures.

The productionist drama has affinity with the film, and has the advantage of flesh-and-blood actors, but on the other hand, since

actors must take time to change their clothes, and scene-shifters take time to replace one scene by another, it lacks the pace of the films. Unfortunately, however, productionist drama, though it may provide a high form of entertainment, is apt to be short of that intrinsic literary value which confers permanence upon a play.

The best examples of expressionism, which is the art of the cartoonist expressed in terms of the theatre, are Toller's revolutionary play, *Masses and Men*, and an American specimen of the drama of revolt, Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, already mentioned. There is no English example of any importance, for expressionism is an extreme phase of productionist drama and does not appeal to English taste to-day, any more than does the crude satire of the European cartoon.

If Shakespeare were alive in this twentieth century he would undoubtedly make use of all the mechanical resources of the modern theatre; but assuredly he would hold the balance true between poetry and paint-pots, and he would not, as was said of Stephen Phillips in reference to *Nero*, have written libretti to Sir Herbert Tree's scenery!

Nero is one example of bad productionist drama, and the stage-carpentry melodramas of Dion Boucicault are another. One recalls the avalanches, the floods, the bridge over a ravine which breaks just in time to let the escaping heroine leap to safety while the pursuing villain is precipitated into the chasm! These are cases of the crudest ocular effects of the productionist drama.

Is there, then, no good productionist drama? Decidedly there is. Productionist drama exalts stage effect at the expense of the spoken word, whereas it is the business of production to secure, not merely by elocution, the maximum effectiveness of the spoken word; but there is something to be said for the drama of stage effects.

Peter Pan, exalting stage effects rather than dialogue, is probably the best example of productionist drama. Precisely because the first appeal of *Peter Pan* is to young children it is right that it

should address itself to the audience primarily through the eye. Subtlety comes by the ear, directness by the eye; and young people are not—or ought not to be subtle. *Peter Pan* is a great work of art of the children's theatre: it sums up the dream adventures of boyhood; it also sums up the theatrical devices by which they can be expressed. Anyone who has seen the play can enjoy reading it in the published volume, but a reader who had never seen the play produced would, unless his theatrical imagination is abnormally developed, find the reading more puzzling than illuminating.

Peter Pan, so it has been said, sums up all the adventurous day-dreams of boyhood. Let us take, then, a play which seems, similarly, to sum up all the romantic drama that ever was—Rostand's masterpiece *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Let us use it, as opposed to *Peter Pan*, to illustrate the difference between productionist drama and the drama which calls for production.

The theme of *Cyrano* is simply the clown in love—one of the oldest and most used themes of the traditional theatre. Everything depends upon the treatment. Treatment is all that makes the difference between Helen of Troy as she is drawn by Homer and 'Everybody's Sweetheart' as she is represented by Hollywood. The treatment of *Cyrano* is poetic, romantic, and requires for background to Rostand's verse stage pictures of the theatre green-room, of Roxane's balcony, of the trenches at Arras, and so on, but only and fundamentally as appropriate background to the poignantly romantic play. *Cyrano de Bergerac* is literature. Production enhances its effect in the theatre, but it is entirely readable and comprehensible in book form, whereas *Peter Pan* is not.

Every play requires production—that is, it requires appropriate stage setting and costume, modern or historical or merely fantastic, as the case may demand; but the productionist drama has few good examples—*Peter Pan*, some of the best of the expressionists, and one or two others—and it has very, very many bad

examples. The musical comedy is the commonest and unhappily a very frequent form exploiting the productionist theory. In musical-comedy production money appears to be no object. The whole resources of the theatre are called upon to assist in the production of—what? A libretto with a perfunctory plot of unbridled sentimentality, banal dialogue, and a plentiful absence of wit! The animal spirits of splendidly competent performers, the charms of the chorus, the buffoonery of the ‘low’ comedians, are combined with many scenes, usually of the most conventional type of stage-scene-painting, and with costumes often also conventional, but equally often enterprising, ingenious, and genuinely beautiful, to make, with popular music, a three hours’ entertainment. The mixture undoubtedly can be enjoyed—sometimes—and the cleverness of the actors is undeniable; but people leave their brains at home when they go out to see a musical comedy.

Musical comedy is the leading argument against productionism, of which it is the greatest part. One would not care to recommend for reading purposes the book of even so exceptional a musical comedy as *The Maid of the Mountains*, written by so eminent a playwright as Frederick Lonsdale. Lacking literary quality, musical comedy is ephemeral. It is a mistake to think of literary drama as being highbrow and unactable. On the contrary, ‘literary’ is so far from being a word of reproach that there is, with the trifling exception of the few productionist dramas mentioned above, no good drama which is not also good literature.

By no means, though, does that exclude the lighter forms of drama, like farce. In 1930, in New York, a free translation of a farce more than two thousand years old rivalled in success the negro morality play, *Green Pastures*, to which reference has been made earlier in these pages. That farce was the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, which also had a run in London some thirty years ago. Naturally a farce by Aristophanes is not an ordinary farce, but a farce with ideas. It is triumphantly funny, and it is an anti-

war play. *Charley's Aunt*, a good farce of comic action, is reckoned a marvel of longevity, dating as it does from the 'nineties; but what can one say of *Lysistrata*, first performed in the year 411 B.C. and alive to-day? Good fun never dies.

Although musical comedy stands condemned, the charge of being unliterary cannot necessarily be brought against comic opera—a specific art-form which became in the hands of Gilbert and Sullivan the crowning mercy of the Victorian theatre.

Hamlet, as the old lady complained, is all quotations, and earlier in this book a typical list of familiar sayings from that play is given. There would be no difficulty in drawing up a considerable list of sayings from Gilbert; that is, his libretti survive. They do more than survive, indeed, for with Sullivan's very English music they have come to be accepted in present-day England as the expression of the English spirit by virtue of the literary quality which they possess. Not that one must ignore either the music or the production for which Gilbert wrote. He was his own producer: he knew when he was writing, let us say, that tragic-comic opera *The Yeomen of the Guard* exactly the effect he would attain by staging the pageantry of Merrie England and the glamorous uniforms of the yeomen; he knew what the robes of the Peers would do for *Iolanthe* and the Japanese costumes for *The Mikado*.

Comic opera, in fact, is a leading argument for the plea that the place for a play is the theatre, not the study; but nevertheless the best comic opera, like Gilbert's, can be read in book form dissociated from music and production, and the witty expression of its satirical stories wins for it a separate existence of its own.

Far below Gilbert's level, but still illustrating the fact that the lighter stage has its literature, are the comic-opera libretti of Basil Hood, such as *Merrie England* and *A Princess of Kensington*. Nor, even, is the revue sketch to be entirely ignored. It is something a good deal lower than the one-act play as an art-form: it makes a sharp point very rapidly, and ten minutes is probably

its extreme acting length. The witty pieces of Herbert Farjeon are well known to London playgoers.

Dramatic appreciation lies in appraising good quality in drama whatever its type and wherever it may be found. Granted that in Russian Ballet and productionist plays there exists high art of the theatre entirely or largely devoid of literary quality, it still remains true that literary quality is a sort of touchstone. But certainly if the quality of being literature is something at the heart of the matter it is not the whole of it, for then we should have to bestow the name of masterpiece on the plays of Browning and Tennyson. Without stage-worthiness a play, no matter how marvellous in literary expression, is not a play. Actability is the test, and a playwright must have the sense of the stage manifested not only in the action of his drama, but in the theatrical effectiveness of his dialogue.

The literary quality of dialogue is subtly but essentially different from the literary quality of conversation in a novel: it is written primarily to be spoken. Are they the right words? Let us assume that they 'speak,' that they are dramatic: but are they idiosyncratically the right words to be spoken by that particular character in those particular circumstances? If so, then they have what we mean by literary quality: they satisfy the mind as well as the emotions.

Without that quality of psychological soundness a play may be 'good theatre.' It may have been written by a poor artist with a good sense of the theatre; it may achieve a remarkable but quite transitory success. But the combination of 'good theatre' with literary quality lifts plays of any type, from revue sketches to Shakespearean tragedies, out of the ruck, and much of one's capacity for dramatic appreciation depends upon one's being able automatically, to 'sense,' through the necessary modicum of stage-trickery and good craftsmanship, the underlying literary quality of a play. All types have their good examples. Musical comedy, a thoroughly bad type, has good and bad examples; though, seeing that both Granville-Barker and Komisarjevsky

(the Chekhov producer) have produced musical comedies with disastrous results, it would seem safe to conclude that there is something inherently inartistic and incapable of correction in this hybrid form of the productionist theatre.

The object of the present chapter is to give the reader a little help in recognizing the good in drama, especially when it occurs in forms of the lighter drama. But recognition of the good is made less easy than it was by reason of the modern revolt against the classical form of plays. Not so long ago, whatever the quality of its content, the form of the play was clearly manifest. It was a five-act tragedy, a four-act comedy, a three-act farce: these were the normal standards, and you deduced from its form what type of play you were about to see. But modern construction, influenced by the higher pace at which stage mechanism now allows scenes to be changed, has cast aside the rigidity of the old set forms, and uses, or may use, a large number of short scenes. On the other hand, owing to the necessity for cutting down expenses to a minimum, theatrical managers are obliged to give preferential treatment to plays which have the same scene throughout.

The tendency is towards a greater number of short scenes, and undoubtedly the cinema has had some influence on play construction, but it is incorrect to attribute the mobility of the modern play entirely to the reaction of the film upon the theatre, and too little credit has been given to Galsworthy as a revolutionary constructionist.

Justice was produced in 1910, and one may assume that it was written in 1909, or even earlier. At that date the film was in comparative infancy, and its constructional technique had not been standardized. It is therefore quite safe to assert that Galsworthy took nothing from the film when constructing those three scenes of Act III of *Justice*, which may be regarded as a milestone in modern play construction. It is possible to go back still earlier with Galsworthy and to see the beginnings of the new technique in *The Silver Box*, which was produced in 1906; while

in plays of his latest period, like *Escape* and *The Roof*, the construction as a sequence of short scenes leading to a climax is inherent. Such plays remind one of the cinema, inevitably, and they lend themselves to film treatment without the least difficulty; but they might conceivably have been written in their present form if the cinema had never been invented. One might suggest that the multiplicity of scenes has been made practicable by the revolving stage.

Examples might be cited from other modern playwrights, a good one being Monckton Hoffe's *Many Waters*, but there are plenty of bad examples wherein productionist theory is exploited, and among the numerous scenes one must try to decide which are essential to the story and which are mere interruptions or superfluous illustrations. The old three- or four-act form at least ruled out the possibility of interpolations by scene-painters. Thus the new technique has its dangers, and should be used with the nicest discrimination. An artist works within the conventions of his art, and any extension of the boundaries of the convention, such as twelve scenes instead of four, makes openings for bad art as well as good. The new technique, like any advance in any art, can be abused, and for the appreciation of drama it sets new problems in judgment, besides those indicated in the epilogue to *Fanny's First Play* by Bernard Shaw. The whole of that satirical passage can be studied with advantage. "You don't expect me," says the critic caricatured as Bannal, "to know what to say about a play when I don't know who the author is, do you?"

Lazy-minded criticism puts tags upon authors. It decides after a couple of plays what is the author's line, and very much at his peril does an author dare to make a new departure, and to do, however well, a thing unexpected of him by his critic. It would seem to follow that a Flawner Bannal must necessarily be a 'mug-wump' sitting on a fence and declining to have an opinion at all about a new author's first play.

It is probably true up to a point that the style is the man, but

the unbiased appreciation of drama must recognize style when it reveals itself in a play by a new author, and—perhaps more important still—must allow that an author who has achieved a reputation in one style of play may have sufficient versatility to vary his style without incurring disaster.

The habit of classifying and labelling is a great time-saving expedient and a help to memorizing. It is useful in science and excellent in business; but when the method is applied to artists the results are always exasperating. No individualist will 'stay put' in his particular category. The hero of Arnold Bennett's *The Great Adventure* makes a humorous protest against tying a man down to one sort of work. A painter, he says, sends to the academy a picture of a policeman blowing a whistle, and the work is admired by the critics. Next year, therefore, he must paint another policeman blowing another whistle, and so on, with a succession of policemen blowing a succession of whistles, through a succession of years.

Before leaving the subject of playwriting something should be said about poetic drama. It must be admitted that the popular audience does not take kindly to plays in verse, and this may explain the reluctance of theatrical managers to produce Shakespeare. The Elizabethan audience apparently had no such prejudice.

But there are playwrights who feel that verse is the right medium for drama. The success of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* some years ago was unexpectedly high, and during the last few years there have been other plays in verse by men like W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, often working in collaboration. The American Maxwell Anderson believes that any great drama is written in verse. He has given us *Night over Taos*, *Elizabeth the Queen*, and *Sea Wife*, but he is perhaps better known to British audiences for *What Price Glory?*, of which he was part-author.

The Auden-Isherwood plays which are best known are *The Dog beneath the Skin*, *The Ascent of F 6*, and *On the Frontier*; and

plays by others which may be mentioned are Stephen Spender's *Trial of a Judge* and Louis MacNeice's *Out of the Picture*.

Interesting and striking as these plays are, it is taken for granted that they are meant for the intelligentsia rather than for the usual theatre crowd.

THE THEATRE

THE earliest plays, as has been mentioned, were performed in the open air. The Greeks, for example, held their competitions in a natural amphitheatre, and the spectators stood round like the crowds watching a Cup Final in the Stadium at Wembley. But the Romans built their theatres of stone.

In England and most European countries the first plays were performed in church, but when the congregations became too large the performance took place in the open—on the village green or in the market-place. The trade-guilds were enthusiastic amateurs, and their stage was mounted on wheels, so that it could be taken to a dozen different places for repeated performances. They used a little scenery (Noah's ark, for example) in order to make the acting more realistic; but they devoted more attention to costume than to other stage properties.

The public theatres of Queen Elizabeth's reign were often inn-yards, circular, square, or octagonal, with three galleries or tiers reaching right round. The top tier was roofed over with thatch or tiles, and so was the stage; but the remainder of the 'theatre' was open to the sky, and the audience in the 'pit' (as we should call it to-day) were always liable to be drenched by a storm of rain during the performance. There were no seats on the ground, and the price charged for standing-room was one penny.

The stage reached into the middle of the theatre, and it was therefore possible for the audience to stroll on either side as well as in front. There was no 'picture-frame' stage or proscenium arch, such as we use to-day.

The Elizabethan actors had really three stages on which to work. There was the entire stage for big scenes; there was the front half of the stage, shut off from the rear by a traverse curtain; and there was a scene at the very back, which included the

gallery, and could be used for a balcony scene (as in *Romeo and Juliet*) or the battlements of a castle (as in *Macbeth*). This will explain the curious stage direction one sometimes notices in old plays—"Enter above."

The advantages of this arrangement are obvious. The theatre was small, the audience were close to the players, and hence the 'aside' and the soliloquy were not so absurd as they are in a vast theatre.

Another advantage was that there was no waiting. The play was performed straight through without intervals for scene-shifting. In *Hamlet*, for example, there are no fewer than twenty different scenes. If one had to wait for the scene-shifters, as we often have to do nowadays, the performance would have taken nine or ten hours, instead of the five hours required for continuous acting.

There were no waits caused by the necessity for changing clothes. The Elizabethans had practically no scenery, but they had plenty of clothes; but as most of the plays had several 'plots' running in alternate scenes one party of actors could 'carry on' while the others were preparing for the next scene. In *The Merchant of Venice* you will notice how the three casket scenes are introduced in Act II, Scenes 7 and 9, and Act III, Scene 2. The intervening scenes are devoted to the major theme dealing with Shylock.

A modern play with three, or possibly four, acts has two or three intervals for scene-shifting; but in many plays the scene is the same throughout. The producer who has to think carefully about expense is rather relieved when he finds a good play that takes place entirely in one room. In a typical play by Arnold Bennett, for instance, the scene is a drawing-room. Act I may take place in the afternoon, Act II at night, and Act III the following morning. The actors and actresses will have to change their clothes, but otherwise there will be no time absorbed by moving furniture and transforming landscapes.

Another interesting sidelight on the old plays is the habit of

explaining the (imaginary) scene for the benefit of the spectators. Shakespeare's plays are full of glorious descriptions of scenery. In *Macbeth* (Act I, Scene 6) Duncan explains as follows:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

And Banquo continues:

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle. . . .

Whereupon the audience is aware that the scene is the outside of a castle, with swarms of martins' nests, the birds darting to and fro through the pleasant air. This is the game of "Let's pretend" played with a vengeance!

Sometimes the scene is suggested by question and answer—*e.g.*, in *Twelfth Night* (Act I, Scene 2):

VIOLA. What country, friends, is this?
CAPTAIN. This is Illyria, lady.

These devices are quite unnecessary to-day. The audience has no need to be informed by the players what the scene represents; still less is there any need for the old 'notice' (THIS IS A WOOD NEAR ATHENS) which causes so much amusement nowadays. It is still necessary, however, to make the audience acquainted with the names of the players and of their relationship to one another. This is frequently done by allowing a maid or butler to introduce the character by name, or, if a man is alone, to explain by means of a telephone, thus:

Yes? . . . Hullo! . . . Yes! . . . This is Robert Groves speaking.
. . . My wife is out at present, but she will be back in a few minutes.

One other curiosity about the Elizabethan stage ought to be

referred to at this point. It was the custom for some of the more wealthy patrons of the theatre to take their seats upon the stage among the actors. They frequently got in the way, and sometimes interrupted the play because it did not happen to meet with their approval. In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* Beaumont and Fletcher make fun of the citizen and his wife who sit on the stage, continually exchanging remarks about the characters or addressing the people in the play. It is recorded that the production of this play caused great offence.

Here is a short extract which will illustrate their burlesque:

From Act I, Scene 3

RALPH. There are no such courteous and fair well-spoken knights in this age; they will call one the son of a sea-cook that Palmerin of England would have called fair sir; and one that Rosicler would have called right beautiful damsel they will call old witch.

WIFE. I'll be sworn will they, Ralph; they have called me so an hundred times about a scurvy pipe of tobacco.

RALPH. But what brave spirit could be content to sit in his shop with a flappet of wood, and a blue apron before him, selling Methridatam and Dragons' Water to visited houses, that might pursue feats of arms, and through his noble achievements procure such a famous history to be written of his heroic prowess?

CITIZEN. Well said, Ralph; some more of those words, Ralph.

WIFE. They go finely, by my troth.

RALPH. Why should I not then pursue this course, both for the credit of myself and our company? For amongst all the worthy books of achievements I do not call to mind that I yet read of a grocer-errant: I would be the said knight. Have you heard of any that hath wandered unfurnished of his squire and dwarf? My elder prentice Tim shall be my trusty squire, and little George my dwarf. Hence, my blue apron! Yet, in remembrance of my former trade, upon my shield shall be portrayed a burning pestle, and I will be called the Knight of the Burning Pestle.

WIFE. Nay, I dare swear thou wilt not forget thy old trade; thou wert ever meek.

RALPH. Tim!

TIM. Anon.

RALPH. My beloved squire, and George my dwarf, I charge you that from henceforth you never call me by any other name but the Right Courteous and Valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle; and that you never call any female by the name of a woman or a wench, but fair lady, if she have her desires; if not, distressed damsel; that you call all forests and heaths, deserts; and all horses, palfreys.

WIFE. This is very fine: faith, do the gentlemen like Ralph, think you, husband?

CITIZEN. Ay, I warrant thee; the players would give all the shoes in their shop for him.

RALPH. My beloved Squire Tim, stand out. Admit this were a desert, and over it a knight-errant pricking, and I should bid you inquire of his intents, what would you say?

TIM. Sir, my master sent me to know whither you are riding?

RALPH. No, thus: Fair sir, the Right Courteous and Valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle commanded me to inquire upon what adventure you are bound, whether to relieve some distressed damsel or otherwise.

CITIZEN. Dunder blockhead cannot remember.

WIFE. I' faith, and Ralph told him on't before; all the gentlemen heard him; did he not, gentlemen, did not Ralph tell him on't?

GEORGE. Right Courteous and Valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle, here is a distressed damsel to have a halfpennyworth of pepper.

WIFE. That's a good boy, see, the little boy can hit it; by my troth, it's a fine child.

RALPH. Relieve her with all courteous language. Now shut up shop: no more my prentices, but my trusty squire and dwarf. I must bespeak my shield and arming-pestle.

CITIZEN. Go thy ways, Ralph. As I am a true man, thou art the best on 'em all.

WIFE. Ralph! Ralph!

RALPH. What say you, mistress?

WIFE. I prithee, come again quickly, sweet Ralph.

RALPH. By-and-by.

The actors are Ralph, Tim, and George; the citizen and his wife are supposed to be members of the audience who have obtained seats on the stage.

We have no such troubles to-day, fortunately, but our enjoyment of a play is often spoilt by late-comers and by people who make running comments to their friends. Theatrical managers are doing their utmost to check both these forms of annoyance, and one of the most effective ways of doing so is by ridicule from the stage. There is a popular skit called *The Late-comers*, for instance, and the chatterboxes in the audience are often made the subject of a comic turn in the music-hall or the revue.

When Charles II came to the throne our English actors returned from the Continent and the companies re-formed once more. The king was friendly to drama, but he wished to keep the theatre in his own power, and, as we have seen, he granted permission to two men, Killigrew and D'Avenant, to make a start.

The open-air theatre had passed away completely, and the new theatres were oblong in shape, with the stage occupying one end. Artificial lighting was introduced, and scenery became important. It was no longer necessary to explain to the audience where the actors were supposed to be. Moreover, owing to the time which would have been wasted between the various scenes, the Restoration playwrights were not allowed to jump about from place to place as the Elizabethans did. A new technique was required.

In another way the plays had to be different from those of Shakespeare's day. The audience consisted only of a special clique, chiefly from the upper classes, and their tastes were not those of the populace. They preferred wit, intrigue, complicated situation; and hence we get the comedy of manners or the heroic tragedy rather than romance or melodrama.

There was another important change at this time. During the time he had been abroad Charles II had seen women perform on the stage, and he saw no reason why the old ban against women should not be removed in his own kingdom. It is true that a French actress had made an appearance in England some years before, but she had been hissed off the stage. Now, however, the

actress became popular, and this had its influence upon the type of play which the time demanded.

Boys could act the part of a young woman like *Miranda* or *Rosalind*, but they could not possibly understand the temperament of a middle-aged Society lady, nor could they introduce the subtleties of look and gesture which make all the difference in the interpretation of character.

In the eighteenth century small theatres went out of favour, and the originals of our Covent Garden Opera House and Drury Lane were built. They were enormous buildings, capable of seating thousands of people, but obviously the character of the play had to be changed. There was no longer an apron stage (which was still used in Restoration days), and therefore no intimacy between the actors and the audience. Every word had to be shouted loudly to reach the highest gallery, and subtlety was impossible. The plays had to rely upon spectacle, massive effects, broad melodrama, crude characterization, and rhetorical dialogue.

The building of the big theatres was a mistake. They were frequently only half or a quarter filled, and people greatly preferred smaller places. But an Act of Parliament was passed in 1737 which had the effect of destroying the little theatres, and many people ceased to find any pleasure in the drama.

There were a few great actors and actresses, like Garrick and Mrs Siddons; and there were one or two great dramatists, like Sheridan and Goldsmith; but on the whole the theatre suffered badly during the eighteenth century, and the early part of the nineteenth century was even worse. The big theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, were made bigger than ever, and the plays became still more spectacular and melodramatic.

The literary man was completely out of sympathy with the sort of dramatic fare which the producers demanded, and he either wrote the sort of plays which were intended for reading, or betook himself to writing poetry and novels.

Fortunately, however, a fresh Act of Parliament in 1843 gave

the small theatre a chance to reopen, and after a time both the plays and the audience improved in quality. The middle classes began to attend once more, and the theatre ceased to be regarded as a place of amusement for the aristocrats and the riff-raff of the town. It became serious, and the new type of drama which appeared gave the audience something which appealed to the mind.

Broadly speaking, there are the two opposing types of theatre still in existence. There is the kind which aims solely at the stirring of the senses by means of music, gorgeous scenery, dancing, beauty choruses, etc., and the other kind which gives one drama which stimulates thought and imagination. The former pretends to be nothing more than amusement with a flavour of 'naughtiness,' and attracts the people who want a night out; the latter tries to give real drama, the food which nurtures the imagination and saves the soul alive.

The bored man of business and the equally bored wife insist that they need light entertainment, and strongly dislike the play which makes them think; but light entertainment quickly becomes monotonous, while the more intelligent drama happens to be intensely interesting as well as moving. To go to a succession of farces, revues, and musical comedies is rather like feasting on fancy cakes when you are hungry.

During the last half-century the quality of the drama in this country has been steadily improving, and the twentieth century has brought a revival which future generations will probably regard with as much admiration as we feel for the Elizabethan age.

We have all kinds of theatres to-day. There are the enormous buildings like His Majesty's and the Adelphi; but there is no dearth of little theatres, and some of them, like the Arts, the Gate, the Mercury, and the Q Theatre, have done remarkably good work.

The amateur movement is stronger now than it has ever been before, and amateurs naturally work in little theatres—in school-

rooms, village halls, converted barns, and the like. The splendid work done by the amateurs has been discussed in another chapter.

The scenic artist has made tremendous strides. One can see a sandstorm in the desert, complete with camels, or a storm at sea reproduced so realistically that one forgets the theatre altogether. The use of electric light has worked a revolution in stage effects. The producer can give us golden sunsets, thunderstorms, moonlight, and nearly all the phenomena of Nature, from volcanic eruptions to blizzards.

Some people argue that over-elaborate scenic effects tend to detract from the play. When the wonderful garden scene was produced in *The Winter's Tale* the audience found themselves watching the gambols of the rabbits and the movements of the doves, instead of listening to the magic words of Perdita:

O Proserpina,

For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall,
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength—a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one! O, these I lack,
To make you garlands of . . .

You cannot appreciate a lovely lyric passage like that when you wonder whether the birds will fly into the auditorium, and whether the rabbits are tied by the hind-leg!

Realism can defeat its own purpose. The Elizabethans did without scenery altogether, but later on conventional scenery was used and was accepted without criticism. When, however, the Realists began to demand that the details should be historically and topographically correct the producer became an ex-

ceedingly important person. He insisted upon having the most elaborate scenes, but inevitably he wasted a great deal of time between the acts. Hence the formal three-act play became a standard requirement.

The noticeable tendency to divide a play into eight or more scenes, which shows itself in such plays as *Escape*, by Galsworthy, or *Cynara*, by Mr H. M. Harwood, may be partly attributed to the recent inventions for expediting the change of scenery. England is still behindhand compared with the Continent in stage machinery, but the devices of the modern producer are innumerable. He can reproduce actual sounds by means of gramophones and amplifiers; he can create cloud effects by the Schwabe-Hasait system; he can instantaneously change his colour schemes by touching a few switches; and he can transform the back of the stage into a flight of stairs by pressing a few levers.

It is a curious fact that people who walk past a steam-roller in the street with indifference grow excited and enthusiastic when a steam-roller is brought on the stage!

The realism of the stage has probably gone too far, and everywhere one sees attempts to escape from its tyrannical exactitude. Perfect simplicity becomes the watchword, and a decorative background is regarded as the ideal. In other cases bare walls are preferred, and so we get a 'Back-to-the-Elizabethan' movement. In still others we find symbolic forms or weird Futurist designs.

The two men who have led the revolt against realistic scenery are Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig, and their ideas of stage production have been tried all over Europe and America. These men are artists, and their conceptions are influenced by the austere principles of line. Drama, they argue, must become dramatic again: it must present the soul of life, and not merely its superficial presentment. Gordon Craig, the famous son of Miss Ellen Terry, was an actor at the age of thirteen, but at twenty-five he abandoned the stage for drawing and wood-

engraving. He established a school in Florence in 1913, and severed his connexion with the British stage.

Our commercial theatres are obsessed with the idea of ostentatious display and 'expensive' scenery, but we can find the real artist at work in the smaller theatres, particularly the Repertory theatres. Occasionally, too, we discover a company of amateurs whose conceptions of a beautiful production are based upon simplicity. It is quite possible to achieve extremely pleasing results at a nominal cost.

One other point is worth considering before leaving the subject of theatres—viz., the argument that the theatre must precede the drama. That is to say, the dramatist writes the kind of play which the theatre is capable of producing; he does not write the play first and then order the particular sort of theatre which his play requires. It may seem a little odd—rather like purchasing a horse to fit the harness. Still, the history of the stage has abundant evidence to justify the contention.

The Greek dramatists wrote plays suitable for open-air performance on a vast scale. The Elizabethans wrote declamatory plays which were admirably adapted for the platform stage of the period. The intimacy between actor and spectator disappeared when the apron stage retreated behind the proscenium arch. The picture-frame stage demanded realistic drama, and got it. The Moscow Art Theatre appeared, and Chekhov retracted his decision to write no more plays: he wrote plays which made the fullest use of the new possibilities. The Abbey Theatre led to the Irish drama. The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, called for the Manchester School. Cinema photography inevitably preceded the drama of the silent film. The 'talkie' required a new type of play, and the play came. The possibilities of 'radio' drama brought a challenge to dramatists to produce the particular sort of play which the B.B.C. conditions impose, and plays are written specifically for broadcast performance.

Mr Murray McClymont wants to see a Scottish School of Drama, and begins by demanding a Scottish Theatre. There are

plenty of plays about Scottish subjects—*Macbeth*, *What Every Woman Knows*, *The Glen is Mine*, *Marigold*, *Buntz Pulls the Strings*, *The Little Minister*, and many more; but although the characters and scenes belong to the other side of the Tweed, the plays are not Scottish in spirit and outlook. He says : ¹

If the temper, texture, colour, and slant of the dramatist's mind be innately, profoundly, and therefore quite unaffectedly Scottish, his play, assuming it to be a work of art, cannot fail, with or without a Scottish setting, to be a Scottish play. But if, on the other hand, his mind has become denationalized then neither setting, idiom, *dramatis personæ*, haggis, bagpipes, tappit hens, nor birth will serve to invest his play with a truly national quality.

Mr St John Ervine's comment ¹ is amusing :

Scottish dramatists may be divided into two stereotyped groups: the first generally fill their plays with mournful females who occupy all their time in lamenting over their misbegotten babies by some lonely loch into which eventually the infants are hurled. Let one of these authors loose with a few ochones, a couple of "Wae, wae the nights" and a whaup or two, and he will provide you with a great night of misery. The other group feels that life is real, life is earnest—its members nearly all come from the banks of the Clyde—and they bore their audiences with disquisitory pieces on the nationalization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, in which there is much information about the wages paid to tram-drivers and the comparative costs of units of electricity under private and municipal enterprise.

Some years ago playwrights feared that the legitimate theatre would be destroyed by the cinema. They foresaw all the young actors and actresses being absorbed into the film studios and the younger dramatists writing directly for the screen. Moreover, they saw that the cinema could achieve many things impossible to the stage, and they realized its popularity with the general public. There was a time when it seemed likely that the stage

¹ *The Observer*.

would be entirely superseded by the film; that it would become a museum piece like the stage-coach.

But the fears were unfounded. People still prefer the play which is performed by flesh-and-blood actors, and hence all the theatres are doing well. Many of them are filled to capacity at every performance. A good play will always attract an audience—provided the audience gets to hear about it.

The gramophone has not killed the orchestra; the cameraman has not destroyed the painter; the wireless news has not made an end of the daily newspaper. There is room both for the film play and for the stage play. Each can do something denied to the other. A comedy like *Pygmalion* reached many thousands as a stage play; it reached many millions as a film. In one way or the other drama is reaching the multitudes. Is this a cause for lamentation?

THE MAKING OF A PLAY

MOST people think of drama as a special branch of literature, regarding a one-act play as a short story told in dialogue, and a full-length play as equivalent to a novel; but it is a great mistake to confuse drama with literature. The fact that they both deal with words has misled us, for language is by no means the essential thing. A drama may be presented in the form of a silent film, or as a 'talkie'; it may even be performed by marionettes. The producer of the play can ally himself with a number of different arts—music, painting, dancing, oratory, literature, but drama itself is not to be identified with any one of them.

Let us imagine that a dramatist is about to write a play, and that the play will eventually be produced. What are the stages or processes through which the play will pass from the first flash of inspiration to the public performance?

First of all there is the theme, or thesis. The play may deal with a subject like jealousy, ambition, or the conflict between honour and riches. It may be based upon an idea such as "One law for the rich, another for the poor," or "A woman may kill her son because she loves him."

Then there is the story, or plot. The theme of jealousy may be illustrated by half a hundred different stories, from Shakespeare's *Othello* to Eugene O'Neill's *Welded*; the idea that a woman may commit murder for love may take the form of Somerset Maugham's *The Sacred Flame* or Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The plots are entirely different, but the underlying *motif* is the same.

Then there is the question of the characters. Many dramatists think of the characters first, and the plot is more or less evolved from them. It often happens, as Mr St John Ervine tells us, that the characters refuse to fit into the plot; they insist on behaving in a way which the dramatist did not anticipate.

When characters are invented solely to carry out a given plot we generally feel that they are merely puppets—not real people of flesh and blood. We may be amused by their story, but we cannot be greatly moved unless we are convinced of their reality.

There is a parallel in the case of fiction. A young boy or girl appreciates a thrilling story for the sake of its action, but an adult, unless his mind be still immature, cannot become enthralled with the adventures of people who do not think, talk, feel, and act like human beings.

The farce or burlesque is an example of stage people who manage to get themselves into a series of ridiculous and complicated situations, but we can never forget that they are entirely unreal, and that if one of them suddenly developed a bit of common sense the story would fall to pieces. They are like the wooden pieces of a chess game, or the famous *A*, *B*, and *C* of arithmetic. Their problems interest us, just as the detective story interests us, as a kind of jigsaw puzzle; but it is all artificial and utterly different from the emotion inspired by living beings like ourselves.

Henry Arthur Jones declared that character and action in a play were inseparable. He found it impossible to start a play with a group of well-defined characters unless he imagined their actions at the same time, and also their reactions upon each other. "On the stage," he said, "character is in a vacuum until it is revealed by action. Until you have some sort of story, however meagre, you have no play."

It must not be supposed that the dramatist thinks of these things separately. An idea for a play may flash suddenly upon his mind; and theme, story, characters, and scene appear simultaneously to his imagination. The critic may analyse the play into its ingredients, but the creative artist does not work in this way. One might just as easily imagine a poet thinking out his metre independently of his theme.

The dramatist may conceive the last act first of all, and then 'think backward' to discover the processes that lead up to the climax which he desires. He may conceive a splendid first act

with a dramatic 'curtain' and find that his inspiration has ended. In that case he may decide to write a one-act play instead of the three-act play which he originally intended.

There are no hard-and-fast rules about the making of a play, and if it were possible to formulate some the dramatist would probably achieve as brilliant a result by breaking them as by obeying them.

But let us suppose that the dramatist has the great gift of creating characters capable of thinking for themselves and behaving like human beings. (He must be a careful and shrewd observer of his fellows, and he must have a keen insight into psychology before he can achieve this.) Let us suppose too that he has thought out a plausible story based upon a theme which is intrinsically interesting and dramatic. He will have modified the story a score of times to suit the characters, of course, and the final story may be very different from the one with which he started out. Let us suppose that he can write dialogue which sounds natural and lifelike, dialogue which is thoroughly characteristic and revealing.

The dramatist may then set to work and write the play. The play may be printed and read by the general public with appreciation, or otherwise, but the majority of dramatists think it bad policy to publish a play before it has been produced.

There is one other quality, however, which is of incalculable importance—viz., the sense of the theatre. It is useless trying to define this instinct, but its significance is fairly obvious. There are hundreds of plays which are dramatic to read, but when they are performed on the stage they fail to 'come across' to the audience. There is something lacking: they just miss making a real impression. And in the theatre a miss is as good as a mile.

On the other hand, there are hundreds of plays which may not appear particularly striking in print, but on the stage they are extremely successful. One can only infer that the author has an unconscious knowledge of theatrical effect as opposed to purely literary effect. The actor or producer who becomes a playwright

has already the advantage of experience, and it is indispensable for a dramatist to be in close touch with the theatre as a play-producing instrument and also to familiarize himself with the typical audience for whom he writes his plays.

A hermit might write a fine literary play for the 'armchair theatre,' but if he wrote a play which came triumphantly across the footlights to a modern audience one could only regard it as an amazing accident or a miracle.

The dramatist must have a practical mind. He will have to find a man who is willing to risk losing a small fortune in producing his play, and the question of expenses is a serious item. The man who runs a Repertory theatre may be ready to produce the play because he thinks it is good drama, but in the commercial theatre the dramatist will encounter a man who looks at the play mainly as a financial speculation. The former is an idealist, and thinks about the welfare of drama in this country; the latter is a gambler who is out to make a 'pile' for his syndicate.

There is the cost of presentation to be considered, and the stage scenery is an important item. A play may be declined because the expenses of production would be too heavy. If the scene is a drawing-room or a kitchen the problem is easy; but if Act I requires a setting in the Doge's Palace, Act II a scene on the Lido, and Act III a view of the Grand Canal with a gondola on real water the cost may be prohibitive.

John Drinkwater, who was a producer of plays as well as a dramatist, says that the playwright really thinks very little about his scene at all.

In essentials, it may almost be said that one place is as good as another for the operation of his figures and events. As a wide generalization it may be conjectured that more often than not the dramatist selects some arbitrary scene and proceeds to forget all about it, except for practical purposes which increase in importance as he declines from organic to mechanical construction. A street in Venice, the plains of Troy, an Irish inn, a Mayfair lounge, what you will, these are, or may be, no more than the spin of a coin to the dramatist's

imagination. But such shadowy habitations have to become solid and exact on the stage. A new mind is brought into the bargain. All may still be well, but here is yet another hint of necessary compromise. And there are others, supplied by the electrician, the fly-man, the prompter, the wardrobe-mistress, the property-master, the gentleman on the cornet, the heigho, the wind and the rain.¹

There is the question of salaries also to be considered. A play which requires two or three important actors and actresses, with half a dozen servants, butlers, and policemen is a practicable proposition; but a play which requires a dozen 'stars,' with 'star salaries,' and several changes of costume may compel a manager to reject it in favour of something which can be produced more cheaply.

The practical difficulties of producing a play are enormous. The dramatist's work is not finished when he has written "Curtain" at the end of his last act. He must send his play to various theatrical managers for consideration, and in some cases he will hear no more about it for six months. The manager may have too many plays already on hand; he may have had a few failures and be seriously thinking about going in for films; he may read the play and realize that such a subject requires a big stage, whereas his stage is small; he may feel that in spite of its good qualities it would not appeal to the public.

Perhaps the play will be impossible without a definite type of actor or actress of 'star' fame, and the only ones he knows who could do the part are already booked for the next three years. If he does know an actress who could undertake the part he may approach her on the subject. She will read the play and may not care for it; or she may like it and demand a salary which is too high. The manager may try others and in the end he may engage an actress who is totally unfitted for such a part.

Bad casting will ruin any play. The part of Peter Pan has been admirably played by Miss Nina Boucicault, Miss Pauline Chase, Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson, and Miss Gladys Cooper,

¹ *The Gentle Art of Theatre-going* (Benn).

but one could name a dozen first-class actresses who would be dreadful misfits in a part like that.

Let us be optimistic, however, and suppose that the manager likes the play and believes that it would suit his theatre; that he has found the right actors and actresses for the principal parts; that he can afford the cost of the production; and that he has found a man or a syndicate willing to finance the play.

Before the play can be put on the stage for public performance it has to undergo yet another test: it must be submitted to the Censor for approval. If the Censor refuses to pass the play it may be printed and sold by the thousand: the mere fact that it has been banned will incite people to buy it. It may be produced privately—by one of the Sunday societies, for example. But it cannot be seen by the general public, and, as far as the theatrical manager is concerned, the play is finished.

The Censor is not concerned with the literary or dramatic qualities of the plays he reads. He thinks only of the moral influence, and may be regarded as a guardian of public safety. He makes certain that there is no presentation of divine persons, of members of the royal family, or of well-known people, like the Prime Minister. He takes care too that there is nothing offensive to any of the religions of the country. A comic curate is allowed in a farce, and a hypocritical vicar may appear in a serious play; but a play which attacked the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Anglican Bishops would almost certainly be rejected as dangerous to the religious faith of the country.

The Censor has enormous power, but in actual practice he is very lenient. He may demand that a few of the stronger oaths should be 'toned down,' or that a suggestive remark should be omitted; but he rarely 'bans' a play in its entirety. After all, the Censor has passed *Our Betters*, *Fata Morgana*, and a dozen other plays which would have been 'damned' a few years ago; and the majority of our farces contain bedroom scenes which would have shocked our grandfathers as certainly as they would have pleased the playgoer in Elizabethan or Restoration days.

We assume that the Censor takes no exception to the play of our imaginary dramatist, and already a few paragraphs are beginning to make their appearance in the newspapers in order to awaken the interest of the eventual public.

The producer now takes the play in hand, and rehearsals begin. The players have to memorize their words by heart, to learn the cues for entering and leaving, to know exactly when and where to stand, sit, walk, and to become acquainted with all the other 'business.' Nothing is left to chance. The producer has a thousand and one things to think about—the grouping of people on the stage, the colour of the dresses against the background, their effects upon one another, the strengthening of this part, the modification of that, the emphasizing of an effect. He will criticize the way in which an actor sits down, the way in which an actress weeps, a *faux pas* on the part of a butler, an unintentional Cockneyism, or an accent which is likely to excite unhallowed mirth in the gallery.

The stage-manager, the property-man, the electricians, the carpenters, the scene-painters, the scene-shifters, and the prompter are all busy, and with the producer as the supreme authority they will do their utmost to make the play a success. The author is expected to attend rehearsals. His presence is necessary, if only to sanction the changes that may have to be made in his dialogue or 'business.' When we remember that there are eight or ten ways of saying "Good morning" we realize that lines may be spoken to convey a meaning which the writer never intended. The author may discover that one of the actresses has an American accent which rather spoils the illusion of his English county family. He may demand that the lady shall get rid of her accent forthwith; or he may make a slight alteration in her part, letting her explain that she has been in America for years. The latter is easier and safer; incidentally it may prevent a tornado.

An unknown playwright does not usually dare to interfere too much at a rehearsal. The producer is a man with a forceful

personality, accustomed to having his own way. The author is apt to be rather overawed by the work he is doing in 'licking the play into shape.' He may make a few polite suggestions, of course, but he will not often venture to dictate. On the other hand, an established playwright will take an active part in every rehearsal, correcting the producer from time to time, explaining precisely how a particular line should be spoken.

The first rehearsal may consist of nothing more than the reading of the play as the company sit round a table. The final rehearsal will be done in full dress, exactly as if the audience were present.

The time for the first public performance is now at hand. The play is advertised in the daily Press and on posters to be seen on hoardings, on the front of buses, in the Tube stations, anywhere, in fact, where it will be likely to arrest attention.

The author's name may be announced on the posters, but, from an advertising point of view, it is far more important that the names of the leading performers should be announced. It seems a little hard on the author, perhaps, but if the public is more interested in the personality of the actor than in that of the dramatist the anomaly will persist.

Eventually comes the terrible ordeal—the first night. The critics will be present and their opinions will be published on the following day. If the play is very good it is an exhilarating experience for the author to read notice after notice extolling him to the skies; but if the play is poor or mediocre he will have the mortification of reading criticisms by the dozen—all of them damning his work. At such a time the dramatist rather envies the novelist, whose new book is reviewed gradually, the attacks being spread out over a couple of months or so.

The 'first night' is a terrible ordeal for a beginner. He will be extremely anxious about the reception of the play by the general public. Will he make a big hit? Will his play be a 'frost'? Will his fame and fortune be made or will he be a failure? It is enough to make any man nervous.

Then, at the end of the performance, he will be expected to appear on the stage and face the audience. They may cheer him or greet him with catcalls and hisses. He may make a bow and walk away as quickly as he can, or, if he feels equal to it, he may make a speech. Some authors, unable to face the audience, have been known to sneak away from the theatre during the last act, and the cry for "Author!" has been answered by the producer instead.

When Miss Horniman produced a Greek tragedy by Euripides at Oxford some years ago the audience shouted for "Author"! This may have been due to ignorance, of course, but one suspects the undergraduates of joking. When a play of Sheridan's was revived in New York one of the Press-cutting agencies sent a letter to "R. B. Sheridan, Esq.," offering to collect notices for him. That, however, was not a joke.

When Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* was first produced the author went on the stage at the end and was greeted with tremendous cheering from all parts of the house. The only exception was a man in the gallery, who was 'boo-ing' for all he was worth. Mr Shaw held up his hand for silence, smiled at the critic in the gallery, and said, "My good man, I entirely agree with you, but what are we two against so many?"

It has been felt lately that a play should not be criticized by its first performance. The actors and actresses are always a little nervous and liable to make mistakes which may not occur a second time. Some critics prefer to attend on the second or third evening and thus give the play a fairer hearing. The first-night panic may explain why the notices in the Sunday papers are often more trustworthy than those that have appeared on the morning after the first performance. It is well known that some of the critics actually write their notice during the third act before the play is finished!

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the success of a play does not depend overmuch upon the opinions of the critics. There have been numerous cases of plays which have received bad notices

but have run for months; and there have been numerous others of plays which have been praised extravagantly but have failed after two or three weeks.

We can account for this only by assuming that large numbers of people either do not read the Press notices of plays, or that they do not trust the judgment of the experts. The critic may be a 'highbrow,' and the play which satisfies him does not satisfy the ordinary public, which is by no means highbrow. He is paid to say what he thinks, and a certain number of people accept his verdicts; but the vast majority of theatregoers are indifferent to his praise or censure.

Clever advertising may do much to ensure success, but if the play does not happen to appeal to the people who see it during the first few evenings the money spent on advertising will be wasted.

We are driven to the conclusion that the success or failure of a play depends ultimately upon the unpublished approbation of the public. If people like a play they tell their friends, who tell their friends, who tell their friends, and so on. Popularity of this kind begins gradually, but gathers momentum and increases like an avalanche.

If the general public prefers sentimental plays to serious drama sentimental plays will succeed and serious dramas will fail. The managers will decline to produce the serious play, but will demand sentimental plays every time. It is like the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. The state of the drama in any country depends almost entirely upon the tastes of the people.

The difficulty is that fashions change, and the public does not always know what it likes until it gets it. Twenty years ago war plays were entirely out of favour and *Journey's End* was therefore refused time after time. The reaction against war topics died down after a year or two, and *Journey's End* scored one of the most remarkable successes for years. This led to a fashion in war plays for a time, but quite suddenly the interest in war plays died down, and historical plays became a vogue. Plays

and films about war, especially war in the air, had a great vogue in the early nineteen-forties, but no one knows the saturation-point until it is actually reached.

The most successful playwright is probably the man who has his pulse on popular feeling and has a gift for anticipating a coming change. No one can explain why in a certain year people should enjoy plays about the Far East, any more than he can explain why in a certain season the prevailing colour in women's dress will be nigger-brown or bottle-green. Human nature is full of moods which are widespread but inexplicable, and the successful play, film, novel, or picture is the one which somehow captures the spirit of the time.

Oscar Wilde used to ridicule the changing fashions of dress, declaring that a beautiful thing was always beautiful. In the abstract this is undoubtedly true enough, but he failed to perceive that what is considered beautiful in one age may be disliked intensely in the next. We see it in the architecture of houses, in furniture, wallpaper, carpets, and curtains. There is nothing static in our sense of beauty, and in consequence everything is in a state of everlasting change.

The same is true about drama. The play which is a 'stunning success' in 1938 may make no appeal in 1944. The survival of the fittest depends upon adaptation to environment, and when environment means the elusive moods of a mysterious public which does not know what it wants until it gets it, success depends upon a sort of instinct or *flair*, which can neither be acquired nor expounded.

APPENDIX

REAL LIFE IN DRAMA

I BEGAN this little book by writing, in a personal vein, a Foreword describing some of my early impressions and experiences, treating the subject in a 'gossipy' manner, and avoiding the more formal expression of the lecturer. And now that the book itself is finished I hope the reader will forgive me if I return to the personal note.

Some time ago I was invited to make an experiment in play-reading and criticism in a well-known Literary Institute. The class consisted of about fifty young people whose ages ranged from eighteen upward. They were all intensely keen on the drama; indeed, their familiarity with the subject was a trifle alarming. It seemed impossible to mention a play which some of them did not know, and in a discussion which followed a talk on tragedy, for example, they quoted names like O'Neill, O'Casey, Kaiser, Strindberg, Maeterlinck, Chekhov, Pirandello, Elmer Rice, and Synge as readily as a cinema 'fan' would have alluded to the particular 'stars' who were then in vogue.

The great question now arose as to the best method of conducting such a class. I did not wish to waste time in telling them what they knew as fully as I did myself; nor did I want to adopt the opportunist's method of chatting about any subject which happened to turn up. Somehow or other I had to evolve a definite scheme of work, so that our thoughts would move progressively and with cumulative effect.

I decided to start with Ibsen. He, at any rate, represents the beginning of reality in the theatre, and his influence on subsequent drama was as revolutionary as the teachings of Newton or Darwin on scientific thought.

After the introductory lesson, devoted to finding out how much the class already knew, I managed to borrow fifty copies

of *A Doll's House*. The reading of the three acts occupied three evenings. We discussed the characters, their points of view, the psychological soundness of their actions and speeches, the playwright's technique, and fifty other matters which were incidental to the play.

Then came the big debate. . . .

It began with the great question as to whether Nora acted rightly. In her fight for emancipation she had left her home, her husband, her children, and gambled with her personal happiness and safety. She had gone out and slammed the door. The slam of that door had echoed across Europe: it was heard and multiplied in England when the women demanded political equality with men; it was heard in America; it has been heard more recently in Turkey and Egypt.

But what did Nora find on the other side of the door? Intoxicating freedom? We could not agree about that. It is possible that the fight for freedom may be glorious and exhilarating, but freedom itself may be a terrible disillusion and disenchantment. One member of the class reminded us of Ruskin's first taste of freedom when, as a small child, he struggled to touch the silver teapot. The nurse held him back, but his mother said, "Let him touch it, nurse." It was Ruskin's first experiment in obtaining his own way, and it was a long time before he wanted to try again. He made the important discovery that freedom can hurt.

Is anybody absolutely free? We may win political freedom only to discover that social freedom is still out of reach. Rousseau propounded that man was born free, but is everywhere in chains. But it is not true that we are born free. Our helplessness compels us to remain dependent upon our elders, and for the first eighteen years of life we are more or less parasites.

So ran the argument. When we have finally achieved financial independence in being able to clothe and feed ourselves we immediately set to work establishing new bonds. Friendship is a tremendous force in life, but friendship can only be secured

at a price. One has to make concessions and compromises, to give and take, to sacrifice personal inclinations.

There are two opposite forms of tyranny. There is the tyrant who enjoys keeping us in a state of subordination, who insists upon implicit and prompt obedience, who makes the idea of personal liberty a mockery. One might quote the bullying employer, the strict supervisor, the despotic father or mother, and many more. But the tyrant who loves us and clings to us, who watches our movements with jealousy and suspicion, may be even more despotic. It may be necessary, in extreme cases, for a young man or woman to escape from a too affectionate home in order to save the soul alive.

At this point of the argument a student reminded us of Somerset Maugham's play *The Breadwinner*, which may be fairly regarded as the masculine equivalent of *A Doll's House*. The father had devoted more than twenty years of his life to winning fortunes for his wife and children. He had been successful, and had kept them in comparative luxury: they were all having a good time, indulging their own fancies, dancing, playing tennis, motoring, and the rest of it.

There came the crisis in the father's affairs, and a certain morning when, instead of going to the Stock Exchange as usual, he went for a walk on Hampstead Heath. He wanted to think things over. His wife had plenty of money; his children were both old enough to keep themselves. . . .

He was tired of them, bored with them all. He wanted to live his own life, to do the things he had always wanted to do. He was well on in the second half of life, and had no wish to sacrifice himself to the very end. In the course of his walk on the Heath he discovered that he had been the slave to his family for more than twenty years, and now he was no longer necessary to the family he resolved to declare his independence and live his own life.

What he did subsequently with his precious liberty we are not told in the play. But in the book upon which the play is based,

The Moon and Sixpence, we are told in minute detail how he went to France, lived in a garret, and became a great artist. The dream of his youth was realized in middle age, after he had shaken off the shackles and entanglements of domesticity.

The allusion to *The Breadwinner* inevitably recalled two or three other plays which deal with the same subject of personal liberty from different angles. In *The Silver Cord* we are shown how a doting and thoroughly selfish mother can enslave the whole family, refusing to allow the sons and daughters to marry, and exploiting her maternal affection—in this case a relentless possessive instinct—to prevent their escaping from her. Like many mothers of her type, she played the rôle of the invalid with a weak heart; and her alleged infirmity was employed as a chain to hold the captives in thralldom.

In *The Younger Generation* we see the sons and daughters rebelling against the too strict supervision of their parents. The father considered it his duty to guard the young from peril, demanded to see their letters, to know their movements, to account for their lateness in reaching home.

The Barretts of Wimpole Street is another terrible picture of harsh despotism exercised by a strong father over his three daughters and six altogether spineless sons. The father loved Elizabeth in his strangely morbid fashion, but towards the rest of the family he entertained a hatred which was implacable.

What is the use, asked a young student, of granting political freedom to young people whose lives are spent in such unremitting slavery? Not one of the sons dared to call his soul his own.

The daughters, however, showed more spirit. They were unable to defeat their father in a conflict of wills, but one resolved to get her own way by flagrant lying (without the slightest twinge of conscience), while another eloped with a poet and fled to Italy.

The choice of *A Doll's House* proved to be excellent, not only because it is a great play and a landmark in the struggle for

woman's emancipation, but because it opened up the whole question of personal liberty for men as well as women, for children as well as for parents. It is one of the most urgent problems of civilized life, one which touches every one of us at some time or other. Our whole characters depend to a large extent upon the way in which we settle this great difficulty. With a class composed chiefly of young people I found that here was a question which was vital.

Another student reminded us of Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*, which deals with the same problem of incompatibility. Another suggested that Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* should be placed in the hands of every intelligent young man or woman. From the temper of many of the speeches it could be inferred that the younger generation is anxious to frame a sort of Magna Charta, setting forth clearly where the rights of parents end and the rights of their children begin.

The old-fashioned doctrine that "children should be seen and not heard" belongs to a dead century. All the modern theories of education and psychology are founded upon the idea that repression is dangerous, and that even the youngest have certain rights as individuals. Children are neither chattels nor slaves.

There were many other issues in the long and fiery discussion. A young woman made a strong protest against the popular idea that women admire the sheikh type of lover who conquers by brute force. The masterful man described by Nietzsche can only be appreciated by the helpless woman who ought to be living in a harem. The heroes of Miss Dell and Miss Hull are merely overgrown schoolboys of the bullying type, and any woman who is worth her salt will either snap her fingers in their faces or twist them round her little finger.

Miss Rebecca West fought against the Nietzschean ideal of the woman who exists for the relaxation of the warrior. She strongly resented the notion that woman was to be merely a soft cushion for the tired head of the masterful male, or the vinegar rag around his intellectual brow. Maurice Hewlett's medieval idea

that woman's function is to stand on the balcony bravely waving her handkerchief to the departing warrior was also an insult to the 'weaker' sex. Women wanted to go to war side by side with the men. They did not desire to stay at home in cloistered safety and console the hero when he returned at the end of the fray!

A wife objects to being treated as a household drudge, a cook-housekeeper-maid-of-all-work with no mind of her own; but she resents quite as fiercely the idea that she must be flattered, complimented, made love to, and treated as a beautiful but totally irresponsible pet. Few men think of women as domestic Marthas whose interests are confined to church, kitchen, and children; but a great many men still believe that women care for nothing but pretty dresses, chocolates, theatre-boxes, saloon cars, and having a good time at a man's expense.

There are such women, of course, but they have 'harem minds,' and are not worthy of the womanhood of the twentieth century.

But I must leave the controversy unfinished. When I came to think it over I found that the argument had covered the following books:

The Moon and Sixpence,
Father and Son,
The Way of All Flesh,

and the following plays:

A Doll's House,
The Breadwinner,
The Barretts of Wimpole Street,
The Silver Cord,
The Younger Generation,

and that there had been allusions to Ruskin, Nietzsche, Maurice Hewlett, the Misses Dell and Hull, Miss Rebecca West, and it would have been easy enough to cite Mr A. S. M. Hutchinson,

Miss Storm Jameson, Miss Ethel Mannin, Miss Mary Borden, and a host of others.

The subject around which the whole discussion revolved was the immensely important one of personal liberty. And we had come to certain definite conclusions which should help to determine the form and colour of our lives. It did not occur to me until later that in discussing woman's emancipation the best 'reply' to *A Doll's House* is Shaw's *Candida*. The comparison of Nora and Candida would be an excellent subject.

The natural sequel to the Liberty controversy was to tackle the equally vexed and vital problem of equality, and for this purpose I selected *The Admirable Crichton*, by Sir James Barrie.

We spent four evenings in reading the four acts of the play, and each act was discussed for its stagecraft as well as for the ideas it elaborated. The first act was amusing, and the Liberal Peer's theory that in a state of nature we should all be equals was treated light-heartedly enough. In Lord Loam's Mayfair house the monthly tea when the servants were waited on by the upper classes was made humorous. The idea was never grasped by the 'underlings,' who still quarrelled for precedence among themselves, and if Lady Mary treated her maids like dirt they passed on the treatment to their inferiors. Moreover, Lord Brocklehurst himself was completely dominated by his terrible mother, and the clergyman who felt that he was a "second-eleven sort of fellow" instinctively placed himself under authority.

The second and third acts, the class agreed, seemed unreal and dreamlike. They reminded us of the author's preoccupation with worlds which are remote from the ordinary workaday world. Ibsen was anxious to come to grips with the burning questions of the day: Sir James Barrie was anxious to escape from reality to the magic island (in *Mary Rose*), the magic wood (in *Dear Brutus*), or the Never-Never-Land of *Peter Pan*.

I confess that I had always looked upon *The Admirable Crichton* as one of Barrie's few attempts to deal with real problems of civilized life; but in the discussion which followed the reading

of the play I came to accept the idea that the middle acts represent an escape from facts into the realms of fantasy.

This subject naturally led us to the idea of dream worlds, perfect states, and Utopias generally. Within five or ten minutes allusions had been made to Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Blatchford's *The Sorcery Shop*, H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*, Butler's *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*, Mallock's *New Republic*, and one or two others. The most unexpected remark came from a student who argued that *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-glass* are children's Utopias, and that the middle acts of *The Admirable Crichton* are practically a fairy-story—the materialization of a childish day-dream.

We discussed the author's fairness in the handling of the characters. A fanatic might have shown the servants as altogether heroic in the new surroundings and the aristocrats as hopelessly incompetent. The treatment of Lady Mary is delightful. In London Society Lady Mary was cold, bored, supercilious, haughty; but on the island she became a splendid woman who enjoyed life to the tips of her fingers. She became a Shakespearian heroine as wonderful as Rosalind, Viola, Miranda, or Imogen; and the banishment from her aristocratic surroundings gave her a chance of showing the mettle of her nature.

On the island, at any rate, the ideal of equality was discounted immediately. There was a reshuffling of places according to ability. Lord Loam was fit for nothing better than to become a hewer of wood and a drawer of water; Tweeny was at least equal to Lady Agatha; but Lady Mary soared to the heights of self-realization, and became the only true mate for Crichton himself.

There is nothing profoundly moving in the first two acts of the play, but the proposal of marriage in Act III is tense with emotion. Crichton moves and speaks like a king, and his quotation of the verse from Henley is extraordinarily fine. I had always imagined that the author had that great scene in mind when he evolved the play. He seems to be preparing for that

incident from the beginning. It came as a surprise when I found that the quotation was a last-minute inspiration, actually added on the night before the first performance.

The grand climax, however, is the coming of the ship, and Crichton's heroic renunciation. The man had everything to lose by giving the signal, everything to gain by refraining. Lady Mary herself urged him not to do it. But "Bill Crichton must play the game." I regard that great shout of Crichton's as one of the most remarkable examples of the religious spirit, and I can only compare it to Jean Valjean's self-surrender (in *Les Misérables*), or an incident in the lives of some of the saints. Self-interest, enlightened or otherwise, does not plumb the depths of human nature.

One of our students argued that Crichton's heroism was a mistake: the man should have remained on the island, lording it over his devoted subjects, wedded to the most glorious woman in the world. Instead of which he went back to Mayfair and his work as a butler!

Was the fourth act a mistake? We could not agree about that. Some of the students believed it was necessary to make the play complete. It was an anticlimax, after the life on the island, but Barrie had handled the situation with such dexterity that he softened the shock of disillusion and introduced an element of humour which is 'shot' with cynicism.

Lady Mary's exclamation that she had sat out a dance with the evening star is purely poetical, and is usually admired as a typical Barrie touch; but a lady in the class objected that it was entirely 'unreal' in Mayfair. Considered as drama it was a serious flaw.

Crichton remains heroic, even in failure, perhaps because of failure. We may be moved to admiration by men whose every action is crowned by success; we laugh with mirth, for example, at Arnold Bennett's *The Card*; but our hearts grow infinitely tender towards the brave man in adversity, and we love him more for the catastrophe which has fallen upon him.

Some one recalled *Sentimental Tommy* and the way the boy sneaked home after dark when he had failed in his examination. Some one else reminded us of the heroes of Victor Hugo's novels, all of whom meet with final disaster.

We had to thrash out the whole question of human equality, and some of the young democrats present fought hard, quoting Bernard Shaw, Karl Marx, Rousseau, and other protagonists. But at the final vote the majority agreed with Crichton that some men are born to command and others to obey. D. H. Lawrence's study of democracy in Australia, described in *Kangaroo*, was also mentioned. According to Lawrence, there is no one to command: there are merely officials who see that the laws are carried out. It is useless to criticize them: they are merely the Robots appointed by the State. The ordinary working man does really like to have a 'boss,' if only for the satisfaction of having some one to 'cuss' when he is disgruntled!

It was agreed in an earlier discussion that absolute liberty was an impracticable ideal, and we reached a similar conclusion about equality. What is the value of political freedom when there is no social freedom? And what is the use of financial equality when individuals are everlastingly trying to interfere with each other? As one lady put it, we may give a man and his wife a vote apiece, and we might perhaps give them equal wages; but if one is for ever trying to impose his (or her) will on the other what is the point of talking about equality? Domestic tyranny is as trying as the despotism of kings and dictators.

Such arguments tend to 'clear the air' and give one "furiously to think." Moreover, they deal with problems which press closely upon the lives of everybody, and they are of infinitely greater importance than the sort of material which forms the mass of conventional academic education. The study of a 'live' play is unrivalled for stimulating thought and defining a personal philosophy which all intelligent people have to thrash out for themselves.

Summing up the second discussion, we find that reference has

been made to three or four of Barrie's other plays, half a dozen different Utopias, Shakespeare's heroines, the novels of Victor Hugo, Arnold Bennett, D. H. Lawrence, and the ideas of the democratic reformers. We might have thought of H. G. Wells's novels *Kipps* and *Tono-Bungay*, in both of which there is a study of poor men who suddenly acquire riches and rise to higher social planes; and it would have been interesting if some one had reminded us of Gissing's *Demos*, which describes the effect of sudden wealth upon a working-class family, including a would-be Labour politician. *Little Dorrit* is also indicated in such a discussion.

Having disposed of the great subjects of Liberty and Equality, it was inevitable that we should attempt to tackle the theme of Fraternity, and for this purpose two plays suggested themselves. John Galsworthy's *Strife* (upon which we spent three lessons) deals with an urgent problem—viz., the conflict between Labour and Capital.

Galsworthy does his best to present both sides impartially and to show the virtues as well as the weaknesses of the two antagonists. The students all felt that if the scales were weighted at all the dramatist's sympathies were with the workers on strike.

The actual struggle was between two groups of men, but a fight for wages must necessarily affect the women and children, and the 'human background' of pathetic and stubborn suffering is depicted in the moving second act.

The 'moral' of the story of the strike seems to be its futility. All the suffering was sheer waste, and the final compromise was the acceptance of terms which were offered in the beginning. A strike is frequently useless, and in the opinion of many people should be made illegal; but if an artisan is deprived of his only weapon of self-defence it makes democracy appear a delusion. In any conflict both parties suffer damage, but if there is no ultimate victory the fight is much worse than being merely useless. Civilization has become so intricately interwoven that injury incurred by one part has its reaction on other parts, and

the discovery of the essential solidarity of mankind underlies the main idea of Fraternity.

Men form a great brotherhood, but that does not imply that they live together in a state of unbroken peace. Brothers fight, quite frequently, but the family suffers in consequence; employers and employees come to strife, but the country is the worse for it; nation makes war on nation, but the result is catastrophe for mankind. That is a great lesson which the whole world must learn—or perish.

The discussion of the right to strike and the right of the Trade Union to protect its members became heated; but it soon extended and became a discussion of the rights of small nations to 'live their own lives,' and thence to the great questions of 'self-determination.'

Towards the end of the evening the main object was side-tracked. We went off at a tangent when a member recalled Ibsen's doctrine that the minority is generally right. In any country, ran the argument, there are a few really enlightened and intelligent individuals; but the majority of ordinary bread-and-butter citizens cannot see farther than their own noses. Government by majorities can only mean government by the stupid and the mediocre, and democracy as a system of government stands self-condemned.

Another student reminded us that H. G. Wells started out as a democratic socialist, but with the steady evolution of his ideas he was inclining more and more to the ideal of government by an intellectual aristocracy. In his *Modern Utopia*, for example, the rulers are compared to the Samurai of Japan.

Bernard Shaw is so completely democratic that he would give equal wages to all, irrespective of ability or the work performed; yet in his famous play *The Apple Cart* he has outlined a magnificent argument for the retention of a king—which hardly 'squares' with the fundamental idea of democracy which should express itself in republicanism.

A third student defended democracy, quoting Mr Winston

Churchill's argument (propounded by Lord Randolph Churchill) that in any country there are a number of exceptional persons who tend to cancel out each other's peculiarities; but the opinion of the vast mass of the electorate is sane and reliable.

We switched back to the original idea of Fraternity, and remembered that men may quarrel (as families quarrel) quite frequently, but in the hour of danger all the minor disputes are resolutely put aside and their unity is re-established. The best example of this real brotherhood of men is to be found in a war play, *Journey's End*. In the dug-out at the Front all the differences of social caste or individual prejudice are forgotten. Officers and men discover their common humanity in the presence of the great leveller. Fraternity is inseparable from Equality. Our differences are based upon accidents and trivialities; our kinship is based upon the fundamentals of human life. In our loves and hates, in our dreams and fears, we are all one family. Religion tells us that we are all sinners in the sight of heaven; it also tells us (to quote G. K. Chesterton) that men are equal as pennies are equal, because they all bear the image of the king.

The reading of *Strife* brought us face to face with the great problems of Labour and Capital, their relationship to one another, the function of Trade Unionism, the difficulty of avoiding unemployment, the replacement of men and women by machines, and many other complications. The gap between employers and employed is visible enough at the present day, but what will happen fifty or a hundred years hence? Will the gap gradually diminish as the employers become poorer through crushing taxation? Or will it become a recognized practice for all employees to have a share in the profits on a co-operative basis? Will machines eventually perform all the heavy work and set men free from the everlasting drudgery?

That suggests a starting-point for the next term's work. The play which deals with this subject is undoubtedly *R.U.R.* We must study that play and have a debate about the possibility of making machines do the work for us. Then the whole of man-

kind would be able to enjoy leisure and become a sort of aristocracy!

I can foresee some of the subjects which will emerge. Some member will tell us about the monster made by Frankenstein and warn us that men are creating a creature which will destroy them. Another will quote the warning of Samuel Butler in *Erewhon* about the menace of machines. A third will remind us of Mr Wells's *The Time Machine*, describing how in a few million years humanity will divide into two distinct species, the Morlocks carrying on the world's work, and permitting the aristocracy to go on existing simply to provide food for the cannibals underground! And I am hoping that some one will tell the class about that astonishing book of the future, *Last and First Men*, by W. Olaf Stapledon. It will be interesting, exciting, and, to say the least, it will set us thinking hard about the future of our race.

I have attempted to give this account of a term's work in a class which has collected for the purpose of studying plays. I have done so for three reasons:

(1) The scheme may be useful to a teacher who wishes to start such a class for young people. Apart from the knowledge of drama which comes from the systematic study of good plays, the amount of intelligent thinking involved and the opportunities for frank discussion of modern problems, to say nothing of the practice in public speaking which is afforded, provide a really fine education.

(2) It may reveal to the critics of modern education that the teachers are not preoccupied with the study of subjects which are completely out of touch with daily life and its urgent problems.

(3) It may be helpful to the young man or woman who wants to thrash things out—to read books that matter, to enjoy the thrill which comes from contact with stimulating thoughts and imaginative drama. Incidentally, it shows how much better it is to study in classes or groups than to read alone. (I confess that

I should like to see play-reading classes started all over the country.)

"There are single sentences in the world," wrote Landor, "far outvaluing three or four hundred authors, all entire, as there have been individual men outvaluing whole nations." Whether this be an exaggeration or not, most of us will agree that there are single plays and books which matter more than hundreds that are chosen at random. The lady who reads her novel a day may get nowhere, just as the man who sees a 'show' every night may get nowhere; but there are books and plays the reading and seeing of which are landmarks in our lives.

No teacher can give his students a complete and ready-made philosophy, guaranteed to satisfy them in all the eventualities of life; but if he can set them thinking for themselves, if he can arouse enthusiasm for honest workmanship, if he can inspire a genuine appreciation for what is good, he will have rendered a service which will continue to influence them long after the teacher himself has been forgotten.

INDEX

- ABBEY THEATRE, 119, 143, 190
 Abercrombie, Lascelles, 155
Abraham Lincoln, 43, 125, 137, 146,
 147, 166
Adding Machine, The, 171
 Addison, Joseph, 82
Admirable Crichton, The, 83, 104,
 105-107, 210-212
 Æschylus, 25
Anna Christie, 74
 Appia, Adolphe, 189
Apple Cart, The, 113, 167, 215
 Archer, William, 66, 94, 97, 115
 Aristophanes, 26, 33, 173
 Aristotle, 81
Arms and the Man, 113, 201
Ascent of F 6, The, 178
As You Like It, 44, 54, 59, 62
 Auden, W. H., 178
 Augier, Émile, 89, 162

Back to Methuselah, 113, 114, 137,
 147
 Bacon, Francis, 63
 Ballad-opera, 82, 155
Barretts of Wimpole Street, The,
 207
 Barrie, Sir James, 83, 102-107, 145,
 210
 Beaumont and Fletcher, 52, 57, 66,
 183
Beggar's Opera, The, 82, 85, 147
 Bennett, Arnold, 127, 128, 166
 Birmingham Repertory Theatre,
 136, 146-148
Blue Bird, The, 161
 Bottomley, Gordon, 155, 156

 Boucicault, Dion, 91, 171
Boy David, The, 107
Breadwinner, The, 206, 207
 Bridie, James, 129
 Brieux, Eugène, 98, 162
 Brighouse, Harold, 126, 127, 135,
 145, 166
 Browning, Robert, 91
 Buckingham, Duke of, 76, 83
 Burbage, James, 71
 Byron, Lord, 91

 CALDERON, PEDRO, 88
Campbell of Kilmohr, 156
Candida, 112, 115, 210
 Čapek, Josef and Karel, 161, 170
 Caste, 91, 98
 Cato, 82
 Cavalcade, 124
 Censorship, 36, 73, 198, 199
Chanticleer, 162
 Chapin, Harold, 139, 143
 Chapman, George, 67
Charley's Aunt, 13, 95, 174
 Chekhov, Anton, 140, 161,
 204
Cherry Orchard, The, 149, 161
 Chesterton, G. K., 19
 Chinese drama, 28
 Cinema, competition of, 151, 170,
 191, 192
Cold June, A, 115
 Comedy, origin of, 24
 Comedy and Tragedy, 175, 176
Comedy of Errors, The, 27, 62, 64
 Comedy of Manners, the, 77
 Congreve, William, 77-79, 95

- Connelly, Marc, 35, 166
 Corneille, 88, 162
 Court Theatre, 137, 138
 Coward, Noel, 123, 124
 Craig, Gordon, 138, 151, 189, 190
Critic, The, 83, 86, 141
Cyrano de Bergerac, 162, 172

 DANE, CLEMENCE, 130, 131
Dark Lady of the Sonnets, The, 63
 D'Avenant, 69, 75, 185
 Dean, Basil, 144, 145, 146
Dear Brutus, 103, 104, 210
 Dekker, Thomas, 68
 Dickens, Charles, 38, 58
 Dickinson, T. H., 114
Doctor Faustus, 50
Doll's House, A, 99, 205, 206, 207, 209, 210
 Drinkwater, John, 8, 43, 125, 146, 155, 166, 196
 Dryden, John, 75, 76, 81
Duenna, The, 84, 85
 Dumas père, 88, 162
 Dumas fils, 89
 Dunsany, Lord, 55, 162

 EGAN, PIERCE, 89
 Egyptian drama, 24
 Eliot, T. S., 178
 Elizabeth, Queen, 40
 Elizabethan Theatre, 180, 181
Emperor Jones, The, 132
 Ervine, St John, 62, 124, 125, 191
Escape, 110-111, 177
 Etherege, Sir George, 77
Euphues, 44
 Euripides, 26, 88, 201
Every Man in his Humour, 66
Everyman, 33, 37, 38
 Expressionism, 171, 172

 FARQUHAR, GEORGE, 77, 79
 Fielding, Henry, 83
 Film Society, *The*, 36
 Fletcher, John, 67
 Folio, First, Third, 61
Followers, 156
 Foote, Samuel, 84
 Ford, John, 68
Four P's, The, 41
 Frohman, Charles, 136, 139

 GALSWORTHY, JOHN, 14, 83, 107-111, 138, 176, 214-216
Gammer Gurton's Needle, 43
 Garrick, David, 82, 83, 85, 186
Geneva, 113
Ghosts, 99, 193
 Gilbert and Sullivan, 95, 136, 168, 174
 Gilbert, Sir W. S., 95, 174
 Glasgow Repertory Theatre, 136, 139, 140
 Glaspell, Susan, 145
 Goethe, 88, 162
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 84, 85, 186
Good-natured Man, The, 85
Gorboduc, 51
 Grand Guignol, 168
 Granville-Barker, Harley, 138, 153, 162
 Greek drama, 25, 26, 154
Green Pastures, 35, 36, 166, 173
 Greene, Robert, 48, 49
 Gregory, Lady, 119, 155, 162
 Grein, J. T., 101
 Gutzkow, K. F., 90

Hamlet, 51, 54, 55, 59, 168, 181
 Hankin, St John, 138
 Hardy, Thomas, 168
 Hauptmann, Gerhart, 98, 162

- Hearibroake House*, 115, 137
 Hebbel, Friedrich, 90
 Heine, 90, 162
 Hellman, Lillian, 134
 Henslowe, Philip, 71
 Heywood, John, 40
 Heywood, Thomas, 68
Hindle Wakes, 141, 142
Hippolytus, 138, 154
His House in Order, 117
 Hoffe, Monckton, 128, 177
 Horniman, Miss, 135, 139, 140, 143,
 201
 Houghton, Stanley, 141
 Howard, Sidney, 133
 Hugo, Victor, 88, 162

 IBSEN, HENRIK, 92, 97-101, 114,
 137, 204
Idiot's Delight, 134
Immortal Hour, The, 137, 147
Importance of Being Earnest, The,
 95
 Indian drama, 27
Insect Play, The, 161
 Interludes, 40
Iolanthe, 49
 Irene, 81
 Irish drama, 62
 Irving, Sir Henry, 20, 90
 Isherwood, Christopher, 178

 JACKSON, SIR BARRY, 139, 146, 147,
 154
 Japanese drama, 28
Jew of Malta, The, 49, 50
 Johnson, Dr Samuel, 81
 Jones, Henry Arthur, 93, 94, 116,
 194
 Jonson, Ben, 52, 53, 57, 63, 66,
 86
Journey's End, 202, 216

Julius Caesar, 44, 169
Juno and the Paycock, 42, 119
Justice, 108, 139, 140, 176

 KAISER, GEORG, 162, 170, 204
 Keats, John, 90
 Killigrew, 75, 185
Knight of the Burning Pestle, The, 67
 141, 183-184
 Knoblock, Edward, 127, 166
 Knowles, J. Sheridan, 89
 Kyd, Thomas, 48, 50, 51, 57

Lady of Lyons, The, 89
 Lamb, Charles, 78, 90, 158
 Lee, Nathaniel, 75, 76
 Leeds Repertory Theatre, 149
 Lillo, George, 87
Lionel and Clarissa, 84
Little Minister, The, 8, 102
 Little Theatres of America, 152
 Liverpool Repertory Theatre, 136,
 144-146
 Lodge, Thomas, 48, 49
London Merchant, The, 84, 87
 Lonsdale, Frederick, 123, 173
Love for Love, 80
Love's Labour's Lost, 49, 64
 Lyly, John, 44, 48
Lysistrata, 173
 Lytton, Lord, 89

Macbeth, 59, 63, 168, 182
 Macdona Players, the, 136, 137
 Mackenzie, Ronald, 131
 Maddermarket Theatre, 149
 Maeterlinck, Maurice, 161, 204
Makropoulos Secret, The, 161
Man and Superman, 113, 115, 138
 Manchester Repertory Theatre,
 136, 140-143

- Many Waters*, 128, 177
Maria Marten, 141
Marigold, 40
Marlowe, Christopher, 48, 49, 50, 57
Mary Rose, 104, 210
Masefield, John, 54, 155
Masses and Men, 171
Massinger, Philip, 68
Maugham, W. Somerset, 122, 123, 206, 207
Merchant of Venice, The, 9, 50, 62, 157, 169, 181
Merry Wives of Windsor, The, 61, 63, 65
Message from Mars, A, 12
Middleton, Thomas, 68
Midsummer Night's Dream, A, 31, 44, 65
Milestones, 127, 166
Milne, A. A., 121, 122, 145, 167
Miracle plays, 31
Molière, 162
Molnar, Ferenc, 161
Monck, Nugent, 157
Morality plays, 36
Moscow Art Theatre, 190
Mourning Becomes Electra, 132
Murder in the Cathedral, 178
Murray, Gilbert, 27, 138
Musical Chairs, 131
Mystery plays, 31, 32, 36

NASHE, THOMAS, 48, 49
Nicoll, Allardyce, 50
Novello, Ivor, 153

O'CASEY, SEAN, 42, 119-121, 126
O'Neill, Eugene, 74, 131-133, 145
Old Vic, The, 80, 143
Oliver Cromwell, 43

On the Rocks, 113
Orrery, Earl of, 75, 76
Othello, 54, 193
Otway, Thomas, 75, 77, 82
Outward Bound, 36

Passing of the Third Floor Back, The, 36
Payne, Iden, 138, 140
Peele, George, 48, 49
Peer Gynt, 99, 148
Pelleas and Melisande, 161
Persian drama, 27
Peter Pan, 104-105, 171, 172, 210
Phillips, Stephen, 171
Phillpotts, Eden, 126, 146
Pinero, Sir Arthur, 93, 115-118
Pirandello, Luigi, 162
Plautus, 26, 42
Play of ideas, the, 89
Playfair, Sir Nigel, 80, 84, 147
Plough and the Stars, The, 120
Plutarch, 62
Polly, 82, 84
Priestley, J. B., 128, 129
Productionist drama, 170, 171
Propagandism in drama, 39, 90, 114
Prunella, 138
Pygmalion, 74, 192

Quality Street, 107
Quem Quæritis, 30
Quintero, Serafin and Joaquin, 138, 162

R.U.R., 161, 216
Racine, 88, 162
Ralph Roister Doister, 43, 51, 155
Rattigan, Terence, 131
Rehearsal, The, 76, 83
Rice, Elmer, 133, 171, 204

- Riders to the Sea*, 119, 156
Rivals, The, 85, 86
 Robert E. Lee, 43, 166
 Robertson, Tom, 91-93, 137
 Roman drama, 26
 Romantic drama, 88
Romeo and Juliet, 54, 62, 66
 Rose Theatre, 71
 Rostand, Edmond, 162, 172
 Rowe, Nicholas, 82
 Rowley, William, 69
 Rubinstein, Harold, 48, 93
 Rusholme Theatre, 143
- SADLER'S WELLS, 59, 80
Saint Joan, 43, 112, 115
 Sardou, Victorien, 89, 162
 Savory, Gerald, 131
 Schiller, 88, 162
School for Scandal, The, 14, 86
 Scott, Sir Walter, 41
 Scribe, 89, 95, 162
Seneca, 26, 51
 Shadwell, Thomas, 77
 Shakespeare, William, 43, 47, 48
 et seq.
 Shaw, George Bernard, 43, 63, 74,
 112-115, 137, 157, 201
She Stoops to Conquer, 84
 Shelley, P. B., 90, 113
 Sheridan, R. B., 14, 38, 84, 85-87,
 100, 186, 201
 Sherwood, Robert E., 134
 Shirley, James, 69
Shoemaker's Holiday, The, 68, 155
 Siddons, Mrs, 186
Silver Box, The, 83, 108, 138, 176
Silver Tassie, The, 120
Sleeping Clergyman, A, 129
 Smith, Dodie, 131
 Sophocles, 25, 88
 Southey, Robert, 90
- Spanish Tragedy, The*, 51
 Spender, Stephen, 179
 Steele, Richard, 82
Strange Interlude, 132
Strife, 109-110, 214-216
 Sudermann, Hermann, 162
 Sullivan, Sir Arthur S., 95
 Synge, J. M., 21, 119, 204
- TALKIES, the, 151, 170
Taming of the Shrew, The, 65,
 169
Tempest, The, 11, 54, 61, 169
 Tennyson, Lord, 90
 Terence, 26, 42
 Thackeray, W. M., 38, 78
 Théâtre Libre, 101
They Came to a City, 129
 Thomson, James, 82
 Toller, Ernst, 98, 162, 170
Tom Thumb the Great, 83
 Tragedy, origin of, 24
Tragedy of Nan, The, 125, 138
Troilus and Cressida, 61
Twelfth Night, 9, 182
- UDALL, NICHOLAS, 43, 44
- VAN DRUTEN, JOHN, 129, 130
 Vanbrugh, Sir John, 77, 79
 Vernon, Frank, 135
Victoria Regina, 40
 Village Drama Society, 152
Voysey Inheritance, The, 138
- WALLACE, EDGAR, 152
Wandering Jew, The, 35
Way of the World, The, 79
 Webster, John, 68
 Wedekind, Frank, 162

Wells, H. G., 215, 217

Welsh drama, 153

West, Rebecca, 130, 208

Wheeler, Penelope, 156

When Crummies Played, 87

Wilde, Oscar, 94, 95, 137, 203

Williams, Emlyn, 153

Winter's Tale, The, 167, 188

Wireless drama, 190

Within the Gates, 120

Wordsworth, William, 90

Wycherley, William, 77, 95

YEATS, W. B., 119, 120, 155, 162

Yorkshire Tragedy, A, 87*Young Woodley*, 129*Younger Generation, The*, 130, 207

ZWEIG, STEFAN, 162